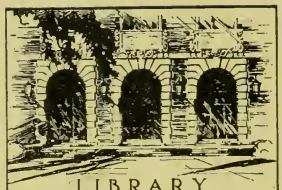

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MY SHIPMATE LOUISE

The Romance of a Wreck

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
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TO

LEOPOLD HUDSON, ESQ.

Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England
Warden of Middlesex Hospital College

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CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	DOWN CHANNEL	1
II.	THE FRENCH LUGGER	20
III.	MY FELLOW PASSENGERS	43
IV.	LOUISE TEMPLE	60
V.	A MYSTERIOUS VOICE	84
VI.	WE LOSE A MAN	108
VII.	A SEA FUNERAL	130
VIII.	A STRANGE CARGO	161
IX.	A SECRET BLOW	182
X.	THE HUMOURS OF AN INDIAMAN	203
XI.	A STRANGE SAIL	223
XII.	A STORM OF WIND	246
XIII.	FIRE!	270
XIV.	CRABB	292

MY SHIPMATE LOUISE

CHAPTER I

DOWN CHANNEL

We had left Gravesend at four o'clock in the morning, and now, at half-past eight o'clock in the evening, we were off the South Foreland, the ship on a taut bowline heading on a due down Channel course.

It was a September night, with an edge of winter in the gusts and blasts which swept squall-like into the airy darkling hollows of the canvas. There was a full moon, small as a silver cannon-ball, with a tropical greenish tinge in its icy sparkling, and the scud came sweeping up over it in shreds and curls and feathers of vapour, sailing up dark from where the land of France was, and whitening out into a gossamer delicacy of tint as it soared into and fled through the central silver splendour.

The weight of the whole range of Channel was in the run of the surge that flashed into masses of white water from the ponderous bow of the Indiaman as she stormed and crushed her way along, the tacks of her courses groaning to every windward roll, as though the clew of each sail were the hand of a giant seeking to uproot the massive iron bolt that confined the corner of the groaning cloths to the deck.

The towering foreland showed in a pale and windy heap on the starboard quarter. The land ran in a sort of elusive faintness along our beam, with the Dover lights hanging in the pallid shadow like a galaxy of fireflies: beyond them a sort of trembling nebulous sheen, marking Folkestone; and on high in the clear dusk over the quarter you saw the Foreland light like some wild and yellow star staring down upon the sea clear of the flight of the wing-like scud.

The ship was the *Countess Ida*, a well-known Indiaman of her day—now so long ago that it makes me feel as though I were two centuries old to be able to relate that I was a hearty young fellow in those times. She was bound to Bombay. Most of the

passengers had come aboard at Gravesend, I amongst them; and here we were now thrashing our way into the widening waters of the Channel, mighty thankful—those of us who were not sea-sick, I mean—that there had come a shift of wind when the southern limb of the Goodwin Sands was still abreast, to enable us to keep our anchors at the cathead and save us a heart-wearying spell of detention in the Downs.

The vessel looked noble by moonlight; she was showing a maintopgallant sail to the freshening wind, and the canvas soared to high aloft in shadowy spaces, which came and went in a kind of winking as the luminary leapt from the edge of the hurrying clouds into some little lagoon of soft indigo, flashing down a very rain of silver fires, till the long sparkling beam travelling over the foaming heads of the seas, like a spoke of a revolving wheel, was extinguished in a breath by the sweep of a body of vapour over the lovely planet. I stood at the rail that ran athwart the break of the poop, surveying this grand night-picture of the outward-bound Indiaman. From time to time there would be a roaring of water off her weather-bow, that glanced in

the moonshine in a huge fountain of prismatic crystals. The figures of a couple of seamen keeping a lookout trudged the weather-side of the forecastle, their shadows at their feet starting out upon the white plank to some quick and brilliant hurl of moonlight, clear as a sketch in ink, upon white paper. Amidships, forward, loomed up the big galley, with a huge long-boat stowed before it roofed with spare booms; on either hand rose the high bulwarks with three carronades of a side stealing out of the dusk between the tall defences of the ship like the shapes of beasts crouching to obtain a view of the sea through the port-holes. A red ray of light came aslant from the galley and touched with its rusty radiance a few links of the huge chain cable that was ranged along the decks, a coil of rope hanging upon a belaying pin, and a fragment of bulwarks stanchion. Now and again a seaman would pass through this light, the figure of him coming out red against the greenish silver in the atmosphere. A knot of passengers hung together close under the weather poop ladder, with a broad white space of the quarter-deck sloping from their feet to the lee waterways, whence at intervals

there would come a sound of choking and gasping as the heave of the ship brought the dark Channel surge brimming to the scupper holes. The growling hum of the voices of the men blended in a strange effect upon the ear with the shrill singing of the wind in the rigging and the ceaseless washing noises over the side and the long-drawn creaking sounds which arise from all parts of a ship struggling against a head sea under a press of canvas.

Aft on the poop where I was standing the vessel had something of a deserted look. The pilot had been dropped off Deal; the officer of the watch (the chief mate) was stumping the weather-side of the deck from the ladder to abreast of the foremost skylight; the dark figure of the captain swung in a sort of pendulum-tramping from the mizzen rigging to the grating abaft the wheel. Dim as a distant firebrand over the port quarter, windily flickering upon the stretch of throbbing waters, shone the lantern of the lightship off the South Sand Head; and it was odd to mark how it rose and fell upon the speeding night sky to the swift yet stately pitching of our ship, with the figure of the man at the

helm somehow showing the vaguer for it, spite of the shining of the binnacle lamp flinging a little golden haze round about the compass stand, abaft which the shape of the fellow showed vague as the outline of a ghost.

Ha! thought I, *this* is being at sea now indeed! Why, though we were in narrow waters yet, there was such a note of ocean yearning in the thunderous wash of the weather billows sweeping along the bends that, but for the pale glimmer of the line of land trending away to starboard, I might easily have imagined the whole waters of the great Atlantic to be under our bow.

It was a bit chilly, and I caught myself hugging my peacoat to me with a half-formed resolution to make for my cabin, where there were yet some traps of mine remaining to be stowed away. But I lingered—lover of all sea-effects, as I then was and still am—to watch a fine brig blowing past us along to the Downs, the strong wind gushing fair over her quarter, and her canvas rising in marble-like curves to the tiny royals; every cloth glancing in pearl to the dance of the moon amongst the clouds, every rope upon her glistening out into silver wire, with the foam, white as

sifted snow, lifting to her hawse-pipes to the clipper shearing of her keen stem, and not a light aboard of her but what was kindled by the luminary in the glass and brass about her decks as she went rolling past us delicate as a vision, pale as steam, yet of an exquisite grace as determinable as a piece of painting on ivory.

I walked aft to the companion hatch and entered the cuddy, or, as it is now called, the saloon. The apartment was the width of the ship, and was indeed a very splendid and spacious state-cabin, with a bulkhead at the extremity under the wheel, where the captain's bedroom was, and a berth alongside of it, where the skipper worked out his navigation along with the officers, and where the midshipmen went to school. There were also two berths right forward close against the entrance to the cuddy by way of the quarter-deck, occupied by the first and second mates; otherwise, the interior was as clear as a ballroom, and it was like entering a brilliantly illuminated pavilion ashore, to pass out of the windy dusk of the night and the flying moonshine of it into the soft brightness of oil-flames burning in handsome lamps of

white and gleaming metal, duplicated by mirrors, with hand-paintings between and polished panels in which the radiance cloudily rippled. A long table went down the centre of this cuddy, and over it were the domes of the sky-lights, in which were many plants and flowers of beauty swinging in pots, and globes of fish and silver swinging trays. Right through the heart of the interior came the shaft of the mizzen mast, rich with chiselled configurations, and of a delicate hue; a handsome piano stood lashed to the deck abaft the trunk of giant spar. The planks were finely carpeted, and sofas and arm-chairs ran the length of this glittering saloon on either side of it.

There were a few people assembled at the fore-end of the table as I made my way to the hatch whose wide steps led to the sleeping berths below. It was not hard to perceive that one of them was an East Indian military gentleman whose liver was on fire through years of curry. His white whiskers of the wire-like inflexibility of a cat's, stood out on either side his lemon-coloured cheeks; his little blood-shot eyes of indigo sparkled under overhanging brows where the hair lay

thick like rolls of cotton-wool. This gentleman I knew to be Colonel Bannister, and as I cautiously made my way along—for the movements of the decks were staggering enough to oblige me to tread warily—I gathered that he was ridiculing the medical profession to Dr. Hemmeridge, the ship's surgeon, for its inability to prescribe for sea-sickness.

'It iss der nerves,' I heard a fat Dutch gentleman say—afterwards known to me as Peter Hemskirk, manager of a firm in Bombay.

'Nerves!' sneered the colonel, with a glance at the Dutchman's waistcoat. 'Don't you know the difference between the nerves and the stomach, sir?'

'Same thing,' exclaimed Dr. Hemmeridge soothingly; 'sea-sickness means the head, any way; and pray, colonel, what are the brains but'——

'Ha! ha!' roared the colonel, interrupting him; '*there* I have you. If it be the brains only which are affected, why, then, ha! ha! no wonder Mynheer here doesn't suffer, though it's his first voyage, he says.'

But my descent of the steps carried me

out of earshot of this interesting talk. My cabin was well aft. There was a fairly wide corridor, and the berths were ranged on either hand of it. From some of them, as I made my way along, came in muffled sounds various notes of lamentation and suffering. A black woman, with a ring through her nose and her head draped in white, sat on the deck in front of the closed door of a berth, moaning in a sea-sick way over a baby that she rocked in her arms, and that was crying at the top of its pipes. The door of a cabin immediately opposite opened, and a young fellow with a ghastly face putting his head out exclaimed in accents strongly suggestive of nausea: 'I thay, confound it! thtop that noithe, will you? The rolling ith bad enough without *that* thindy. Thteward!' The ship gave a lurch, and he swung out, but instantly darted back again, being indeed but half clothed: 'I thay, are *you* the thteward?'

'No,' said I. 'Keep on singing out. Somebody'll come to you.'

'Won't they thmother that woman?' he shouted, and he would have said more, but a sudden kickup of the ship slammed his cabin door for him, and the next moment my ear

caught a sound that indicated too surely his rashness in leaving his bunk.

I entered my berth, and found the lamp alight in it, and the young gentleman who was to share the cabin with me sitting in his bedstead, that was above mine, dangling his legs over the edge of it, and gazing with a disordered countenance upon the deck. I had chatted with him during the afternoon and had learnt who he was. Indeed, his name was in big letters upon his portmanteau—'The Hon. Stephen Colledge;' and incidentally he had told me that he was a son of Lord Sandown, and that he was bound to India on a shooting tour. He was a good-looking young man, with fair whiskers, white teeth, a genial smile, yet with something of affectation in his way of speaking.

'It's doocid rough, isn't it, Mr Dugdale?' said he; 'and isn't it raining?'

'No,' said I.

'Oh, but look at the glass here,' he exclaimed, indicating the scuttle or porthole, the thick glass of which showed gleaming, but black as coal against the night outside.

'Why,' said I, 'the wet there is the sea; it is spray; nothing but spray.'

'Hang all waves!' he said in a low voice. 'Why the dickens can't the ocean always be calm? If I'd have known that this ship pitched so, I'd have waited for a steadier vessel. Will you do me the kindness to lift the lid of that portmanteau? You'll find a flask of brandy in it. Hang me if I like to move. Sorry now I didn't bring a cot, though they're doocid awkward things to get in and out of.'

I found the flask, and gave it to him, and he took a pull at it. I declined his offer of a dram, and went to work to stow away some odds and ends which were in my trunk.

'Don't you feel ill?' said he.

'No,' said I.

'Oh, ah, I remember now!' he exclaimed; 'you were a sailor once, weren't you?'

'Yes; I had a couple of years of it.'

'Wish *I'd* been a sailor, I know,' said he. 'I mean, after I'd given it up. As to *being* a sailor—merciful goodness! think of four, perhaps five months of *this*.'

'Oh, you'll be as good a sailor as ever a seaman amongst us in a day or two,' said I encouragingly.

'Don't feel like it now, though,' he ex-

claimed. 'Let's see: I think you said you were going out to do some painting?—Oh no! I beg pardon: it was a chap named Emmett who told me that. You—you——' He looked at me with a slightly inebriated cock of the head, from which I might infer that the 'pull' he had taken at his flask was by no means his first 'drain' within the hour.

'No,' said I, with a laugh; 'I am going out to see an old relative up country. And not more for that than for the fun of a voyage.'

'The *fun* of the voyage!' he echoed with a stupid face; then with a sudden brightening up of his manner, though his gloomy countenance quickly returned to him, he exclaimed, 'I say, Dugdale—beg pardon, you know; no good in *mistering* a chap that you're going to sleep with for four or five months—call me Colledge, old fellow—but I say, though, seen anything more of that ripping girl since dinner? By George! what eyes, eh?'

He drew his legs up, and with a slight groan composed himself in a posture for sleep, manifestly heedless of any answer I might make to his question.

I lingered awhile in the berth, and then,

filling a pipe, mounted to the saloon, and made my way to the quarter-deck to smoke in the shelter of the recess in the cuddy front. Colonel Bannister lay sprawling upon a sofa, holding a tumbler of brandy grog. There were other passengers in the cuddy, scattered, and all of them grimly silent, staring hard at the lamps, yet with something of vacancy in their regard, as though their thoughts were elsewhere. As I stepped on to the quarter-deck, the cries and chorusing of men aloft, came sounding through the strong and hissing pouring of the wind between the masts and through the harsh seething of the seas, which the bows of the ship were smiting into snowstorms as she went sullenly ploughing through the water with the weather-leech of the maintopgallant-sail trembling in the green glancings of the moonlight like the fly of a flag in a breeze of wind. They were taking a reef in the fore and mizzen topsails. The chief mate, Mr. Prance, from time to time, would sing out an order over my head that was answered by a hoarse 'Ay, ay, sir,' echoing out of the gloom in which the fore-part of the ship was plunged. I lighted my pipe and sat myself down on the coamings of the booby

hatch to enjoy a smoke. I was alone, and this moon-touched flying Channel night-scene carried my memory back to the times when I was a sailor, when I had paced the deck of such another vessel as this, as a midshipman of her. It seemed a long time ago, yet it was no more than six years either. The old professional instinct was quickened in me by the voices of the fellows aloft, till I felt as though it were my watch on deck, that I was skulking under the break of the poop here, and that I ought to be aloft jockeying a lee yardarm or dangling to windward on the flemish horse.

Presently all was quiet on high, and by the windy sheen in the atmosphere, caused by the commingling of white waters and the frequent glance of the moon through some rent in the ragged scud, I could make out the figures of the fellows on the fore descending the shrouds. A little while afterwards a deep sea voice broke out into a strange wild song, that was caught up and re-echoed in a hurricane chorus by the tail of men hauling upon the halliards to masthead the yard. It was a proper sort of note to fit such a night as that. A minute after, a chorus of a like gruff-

ness but of a different melody resounded on the poop, where they were mastheading the top-sail yard after reefing it. The combined notes flung a true oceanic character into the picture of the darkling Indiaman swelling and rolling and pitching in floating launches through it, with her wide pinions rising in spaces of faintness to the scud, and the black lines of her royal yards sheering to and fro against the moon that, when she showed, seemed to reel amidst the rushing wings of vapour to the wild dance of our mastheads. The songs of the sailors, the clear shrill whistling of a boatswain's mate forward, the orders uttered quickly by the chief officer, the washing noises of the creaming surges, the sullen shouting of the wind in the rigging resembling the sulky breaker-like roar of a wood of tall trees swept by a gale—all this made one feel that one was at sea in earnest.

I knocked the ashes out of my pipe and went on to the poop. The land still showed very dimly to starboard, with here and there little oozings of dim radiance that might mark a village or a town. You could see to the horizon, where the water showed in a sort of greenish blackness with some speck of flame

of a French lighthouse over the port quarter, and the September clouds soaring up off the edge of the sea like puffs and coils of smoke from a thousand factory chimneys down there, and now and again a bright star glancing out from amongst them as they came swiftly floating up to the moon, turning of a silvery white as they neared the glorious planet.

There were windows in the cuddy front, and as I glanced through one of them I saw the captain come down the companion steps into the brightly lighted saloon and seat himself at the table, where in a moment he was joined by the fiery-eyed little colonel. Decanters and glasses were placed by one of the stewards on a swing-tray, and the scene then had something of a homely look spite of the cuddy's aspect of comparative desertion. Captain Keeling, I think, was about the most sailorly-looking man I ever remember meeting. I had heard of him ashore, and learnt that he had used the sea for upwards of forty-five years. He had served in every kind of craft, and had obtained great reputation amongst owners and underwriters for his defence and preservation of an Indiaman he was in command of that was attacked in the Bay of Bengal by a heavily

armed French picaroon full of men. Cups and swords and services of plate and purses of money were heaped upon him for his conduct in that affair; and indeed in his way he was a sort of small Commodore Dance.

I looked at him with some interest as he sat beside the colonel with the full light of the lamp over against him shining upon his face and figure. There had been little enough to see of him during the day, and it was not until we dropped the pilot that he showed himself. His countenance was crimsoned with long spells of tropic weather, and hardened into ruggedness like the face of a rock by the years of gales he had gone through. He was about sixty years of age; and his short-cropped hair was as white as silver, with a thin line of whisker of a like fleecy sort slanting from his ear to the middle of his cheek. His nose was shaped like the bowl of a clay-pipe, and was of a darker red than the rest of his face. His small sea-blue eyes were sunk deep, as though from the effect of long staring to windward; and almost hidden as they were by the heavy ridge of silver eyebrow, they seemed to be no more than gimlet holes in his head for the admission of light. He had thrown open his

peacoat, and discovered a sort of uniform under it: a buff-coloured waistcoat with gilt buttons, an open frock-coat of blue cloth with velvet lapels. Around his neck was a satin stock, in which were three pins, connected by small chains. His shirt collar was divided behind, and rose in two sharp points under his chin, which obliged him to keep his head erect in a quite military posture. Such was Captain Keeling, commander of the famous old Indiaman *Countess Ida*.

I guessed he would not remain long below, otherwise I should have been tempted to join him in a glass of grog, spite of the company of Colonel Bannister, who was hardly the sort of man to make one feel happy on such an occasion as the first night out at sea with memory bitterly recent of leave-taking, of kisses, of the hand-shakes of folks one might never see again.

CHAPTER II

THE FRENCH LUGGER

My pipe was out; the quarter-deck bulwarks hid the sea, and so I mounted the poop ladder to take a look round before turning in. Away to port, or *larboard*, as we then called it, was a full-rigged ship rolling up Channel under all plain sail, with such a smother of white yeast clouding her bows, and racing aft into the long line of her wake, which went glaring over the dark throbbing waters, that it made one think of the base of a waterspout writhing upwards to meet the descending tube of vapour. She was the first object that took my eye, and I hurriedly crossed the deck to view her. Mr. Prance, the chief mate, stood at the rail watching her.

'A noble sight!' said I.

'Yes, sir, an English frigate. A fifty-one gun vessel, apparently. Upon my word, nothing statelier ever swam, or ever again

will swim, than ships of that kind. Look at the line of her batteries—black and white like the keys of a pianoforte! What squareness of yard, sir! Her main-royal should be as big as our top-gallantsail.'

He sent a look aloft at the reeling fabric over our heads, with a thoughtful drag at a short growth of beard that curled upwards from his chin like the fore-thatch of a sou'-wester. The noble ship went floating out into the darkness astern, and her pale heights died upon the gloom like a burst of steam dissolving in the wind.

'What is that out yonder upon the starboard bow there, Mr. Prance?' said I.

He peered awhile, and said: 'Some craft reaching like ourselves—standing as we head—a lumpish thing, anyhow. What a blot she makes, seeing that she has no height of spar!'

'We are overhauling her,' said I.

'Ay,' he answered, keeping his eyes fixed upon her. 'Doesn't she seem a bit uncertain, though?' he muttered, as if thinking aloud.

I had wonderfully good sight in those days, and after straining my eyes awhile against the heap of scarce determinable

shadow which the craft made, I exclaimed: 'She'll be a French lugger, or I'm greatly mistaken.'

'I believe you are right, sir,' answered the mate.

He drew a little away from me, as a hint, perhaps, that he desired to address his attention to the vessel on the bow, and suddenly putting his hand to his mouth, he hailed the forecastle in a sharp clear note. An answer was returned swift as the tone of a bell to the blow of its tongue.

'Show a light forward! Smartly now! That chap ahead seems asleep.'

There were no side-lights in those days. Some long years were to elapse before the Shipping Act enforced the use of a night signal more to the point than a short flourish of the binnacle lamp over the side. In a few moments a large globular lantern in the grip of a seaman, whose figure showed like a sketch in phosphorus to the illumination of the flame, was rested upon the forecastle rail, with the night beyond him looking the blacker for the rising and falling point of fire. The hint seemed to be taken by the fellow ahead, and the mate walked aft to the

binnacle, into which he stood looking, afterwards going to the rail, at which he lingered, staring forwards.

I crossed over to leeward to watch the milk-like race of waters along the side. The foam made a sort of twilight of its own in the air. Under the foot of the mainsail that was arched transversely across the deck, the wind stormed with a note of hurricane out of the huge concavity of the cloths, and made the rushing snow giddy with the whipping of it, till the eye reeled again to the sight of the yeasty boiling. Never did any ship raise such a smother about her as the *Countess Ida*. Our speed was scarce a full five miles, and yet, looking over to leeward, when the huge fabric came heeling down to her channels to the scud of a sea and to the weight of the wind in her canvas, you would have supposed her thundering through it a whole ten knots at least.

On a sudden there was a loud and fearful cry forward. 'Port your hellum! port your hellum!' I could hear a voice roaring out with a meaning as of life or death in the startling vehemence of the utterance.

'Starboard! starboard!' shouted Mr.

Prance, who was still standing aft: 'over with it, men, for God's sake, before we're into her!'

Next instant there was a dull shock throughout the ship; a thrill that ran through her planks into the very soles of one's feet, while there arose shrieks and shouts as from three-score throats under the bows, and a most lamentable and terrifying noise of wood-splintering, of canvas tearing, of liberated sails flogging the wind. I bounded to the weather-rail, and saw a large hull of some eighty tons wholly dismasted—a wild scene of wreck and ruin to the flash of the moon at that moment shining down out of a clear space of sky—gliding past into our wake. The dark object seemed filled with men, and the yells left me in no doubt that she was a Frenchman—a large three-masted lugger, as I had supposed her.

In an instant our ship was in an uproar. There is nothing in language to express the noise and excitement. To begin with, our helm having been put down, we had come round into the wind, and lay pitching heavily with sails slatting and thundering, yards creaking, rigging straining. The sailors

rushed to and fro. All discipline for the moment seemed to have gone overboard. The captain had come tumbling up on deck, and was calling orders to the mate, who re-echoed them in loud bawlings to the quarter-deck and forecastle. Lanterns were got up and shown over the rail, and by the light of them you saw the figures of the seamen speeding from rope to rope and hauling upon the gear, their gruff, harsh chorusings rising high above the terrified chatter of the passengers—many of whom had rushed up on deck barely clothed—high also above the storming and shrilling of the wind, the deep notes of angry waters warring at our bows, and the distracting shaking and beating of the sails.

But a few orders delivered by Mr. Prance, whose tongue was as a trumpet in a moment like this, acted upon the ship as the sympathetic hand of a horseman upon a restive terrified thoroughbred.

'Haul up the mainsail—fore clew garnets —back maintopsail yard — tail on to the weather-braces and round in handsomely. Mr. Cocker (this was addressed to the second-mate, who had tumbled up with the rest of

the watch below on feeling the thump the *Countess Ida* had given herself, and on hearing the uproar that followed)—burn a flare—smartly, if you please! Also get blue lights and rockets up.'

I ran aft to see if the vessel that we had wrecked was anywhere about. The moon was shining brilliantly down upon the sea at that time, and the swollen Channel waters were lifting their black heights into creaming peaks in an atmosphere of delicate silver haze, that yet suffered the eye to penetrate to the dark confines of the horizon. The wake of the planet was a long throbbing line of angry broken splendour in the south; but the tail of it seemed to stream fair to the point of sea into which the lugger had veered, and I was confident that if she were afloat I should see her.

'Who is that to leeward there?' called the captain from the other side of the wheel in a tone of worry and irritation.

'Mr. Dugdale,' I replied.

'Oh, beg pardon, I'm sure,' he exclaimed; 'do you see anything of the vessel that we've run down?'

'Nothing,' I responded.

'She must have foundered,' said he; 'yet though I listened, I heard no cries after the wreck had once fairly settled away from us.'

Here the mate came aft hastily, and with a touch of his cap, reported that the well had been sounded, and that all was right with the ship.

'Very well, sir,' said the captain. 'I shall keep all fast with my boats. The calamity can't be helped. I'm not going to increase it by sacrificing my men's lives. The poor devils will have had a boat of their own, I suppose. Show blue lights, will ye, Mr. Prance, and send a rocket up from time to time.'

They were burning a flare over the quarter-deck rail at that moment — some turpentine arrangement, that threw out a long flickering flame and a great coil of smoke from the yawning mouth of the tin funnel that contained the mixture. It was like watching the ship by sheet-lightning to see a large part of her amid-ships and her mainmast and the pale lights of the mainsail hanging from the yard in the grip of the gear—to see all this come and go as the flame leapt and

faded. There was a crowd of terrified passengers on the poop, some of them ladies, hugging themselves in dressing-gowns and shawls; and out of the heart of the little mob rose the saw-like notes of Colonel Bannister.

'These collisions,' I heard him cry, 'never *can* take place if a proper lookout be kept. It is preposterous to argue. I'd compel the oldest seaman who contradicted me to eat his words. Why, have I been making the voyage to India four times——' But the rest of his observations were drowned in cries of astonishment and alarm from the ladies as a rocket, discharged close to them, went hissing and shearing up athwart the howling wind in a stream of fire, breaking on high into a blood-red ball, that floated swiftly landwards, like an electric meteor, ghastly against the moonshine, with a wide crimson atmosphere about it that tinctured the very scud. A moment after a blue light was burnt over the side from the head of the poop ladder, whereat there was a general recoil and more shrill exclamations from the ladies. In fact, these wild mystical lights as it were coming on top of the fancy of men drowning astern, and colouring the ship with unearthly glares, and

flinging a wonderful complexion of horror upon the night for a wide space round about the pitching and groaning Indiaman, put such an element of mystery and fear into the scene that though I was by no means a new hand at such sea-shows, I will own to shuddering again and yet again as I overhung the side of the poop, striving to discern any object that might resemble a boat in the foam-whitened gloom into which the lugger had slided.

'What has happened? Everybody is so excited that one can't get at the real story.'

I turned quickly, and saw the tall figure of a lady at my side. She was habited in a cloak, the hood of which was over her head, and darkened her face almost to the concealment of it, saving her eyes, which shone large, liquid, with a clear red spot in the depths, from the reflection of the flare at the quarter-deck bulwark.

I briefly explained, lifting my cap as I gave her her name—Miss Temple—for I had particularly remarked her as she came aboard at Gravesend, and asked who she was, though I had seen nothing more of her down to that moment. I ended my account pointing to the

quarter of the sea where the lugger had disappeared.

'Thanks for the story,' she exclaimed, with a sudden note of haughtiness in her voice, while she kept her eyes, of the rich blackness of the tropic night-sky, fixed firm and gleaming upon me, as though she had addressed me in error, and wanted to make sure of me. She moved as though she would walk off, paused, and said: 'Poor creatures! I hope they will be saved. Is our ship injured, do you know?'

'I believe not,' said I a little coldly. 'There may be a rope or two broken forward perhaps, but there is nothing but the French lugger to be sorry for.'

'My aunt, Mrs. Radcliffe,' said she, 'has been rendered somewhat hysterical by the commotion on deck. She is too ill to leave her bed. I think I may reassure her?'

'Oh yes,' I exclaimed. 'But yonder, abreast of the wheel there, is the captain to confirm my words.'

She gave me a bow, or rather a curtsey of those days, and walked aft to address the captain, as I supposed. Instead, she

descended the companion hatch, and I lost sight of her.

A disdainful lady, thought I, but a rare beauty too!—marvellous eyes, anyhow, to behold by such an illumination as this of rockets and blue lights, and flying moonshine, and the yellow glimmer of flare-tins.

All this while the ship lay hove-to, her maintopsail to the mast, the folds of her hanging mainsail sending a low thunder into the wind as it shook its cloths, the seas breaking in stormy noises from her bow; but *now* there fell a dead silence upon the people along her decks: nothing broke this hush upon the life of the vessel, save the occasional harsh hissing rush of a rocket piercing the restless noises of the sea and the whistling of the wind in the rigging. The bulwark rail was lined with sailors, eagerly looking towards the tail of the misty wake of the moon, into which the black surges went shouldering and changing into troubled hills of dull silver. The captain and two of the mates stood aft, intently watching the water, often putting themselves into strained hearkening postures, their hands to their ears. Most of the lady passengers went below, but not to bed, for

you could catch a sight of them through the skylight seated at the table talking swiftly, often directing anxious glances at the window-glass through which you could see them. There was one majestic old lady amongst them with grey hair that looked to be powdered, a hawk's-bill nose, an immense bosom, that started immediately from under her chin. The lamplight flashed in diamonds in her ears, and in rubies and in stones of value and beauty upon her fingers. She was Colonel Bannister's wife, and was apparently not wanting in her husband's fiery energy and capacity of taking peppery views of things, if I might judge by her vehement nods, and the glances she shot around her from her grey eyes. It was a cabin picture I caught but a glimpse of as I crossed the deck to take a look to leeward, but one, somehow, that sunk into my memory, maybe because of the magic-lantern-like look of the interior, with its brilliant lamps and many-coloured attire of the ladies in their shawls, dressing-gowns, and what not—standing out upon the eye amidst the wild dark frame of the seething clamorous night.

All at once there was a loud cry. I rushed back to the weather rail.

'There's a boat heading for us, sir—see her, sir? Away yonder, this side o' the tumble of the moon's reflection!'

'Ay, there she is! It'll be the lugger's boat. God, how she dives!'

Twenty shadowy arms pointed in the direction which had been indicated by the gruff grumbling cries of the sailors. The second mate, Mr. Cocker, came hastily forward to the break of the poop.

'Stand by, some of you,' he shouted, 'to heave them the end of a line. Make ready with bow-lines to help them over the side.'

I could see the boat clearly now as she rose to the height of a sea, her black wet side sparkling out an instant to the moonlight ere she sank out of sight past the ivory white head of the surge sweeping under her. She seemed to be deep with men; but I could count only two oars. She was rushed down upon us by the impulse of the sea and wind, and I felt my heart stand still as she drove bow on into us, whirling round alongside in a manner to make you look for the wreck of her in staves washing away under our counter. She was full of people, with women amongst them—poor creatures, in great white caps

and long golden earrings, the men for the most part in huge fishermen's boots, and tasselled caps and jerseys that might have been of any colour in that light. One could just make these features out, but no more, for the contents of the boat as it rose soaring and falling alongside were but a dark huddle of human shapes, writhing and twisting like a mass of worms in a pot, vociferating to us in the scarce intelligible *patois* of Gravelines or Calais or Boulogne.

There was no magic in the commands even of British officers to British sailors to put the least element of calm into the business. It was not only that at one moment the boat alongside seemed to be hove up to the India-man's covering-board and that at the next she was rushing down into a chasm that laid bare many feet of the big ship's yellow sheathing: there was the dreadful expectation of the whole of the human freight being overset and drowning alongside in a breath; there were the heart-rending shouts of the distracted people; there was the total inability of captain and mates to make themselves understood. How it was managed I will not pretend to explain. By some means the boat was dragged

to the gangway, grinding and thumping herself horribly against the Indiaman's rolling, stooping, massive side; then bowlines and ropes in plenty were dangled over or flung into her; and through the unshipped gangway, illuminated by half-a-dozen lanterns, and crowded by a hustling mob of sailors and passengers, one after another, the women and the men—most of the men coming first!—were dragged inboards, some of them falling flat upon the deck, some dropping on their knees and crossing themselves; a few of the women weeping passionately, one of them sobbing in dreadful paroxysms, the others mute as statues, as though terror and the presence of death had frozen the lifeblood in them and arrested the very beating of their hearts. Two of them fell into the sea; but they had lines about them and were dragged up half dead. They were all of them dripping wet, the men's sea-boots full of water; whilst the soaked gowns of the women flooded the deck on which they stood, as though several buckets of brine had been capsized there.

Old Keeling's pity for them would not go to the length of introducing the wretched creatures into the cuddy, to spoil the ship's

fine carpets and stain and ruin the coverings of the couches. They were accordingly brought together in the recess under the break of the poop, where at all events they were sheltered. Hot spirits and water were given to them along with bread and meat, and this supper the unhappy creatures ate by the light of the dimly burning lanterns held by the sailors.

There never was an odder wilder sight than the picture the poor half-drowned creatures made. Some of the women scarcely once intermitted their sobs and lamentations, save when they silenced their throats by a mouthful of food or drink. They were very ugly, dark as coffee; and their black wet hair streaming like sea-weed upon their shoulders and brows from under their soaked caps made them look like witches. The men talked hoarsely and eagerly with many passionate gestures, which suggested fierce denunciation. The mate coming down to the booby hatch around which these people were squatting, eating, drinking, moaning, and jabbering without the least regard to the crowd of curious eyes which inspected them from the quarter-deck—the mate, I say, com-

ing down, stood looking a minute at them, and then sent a glance round, and seeing me, asked if I spoke French.

'Yes,' said I, 'but not such French as those people are talking.'

'We have three passengers,' said he, 'who, I am told, are scholars in that language; but the steward informs me they're too sea-sick to come on deck. Just ask these people in such French as you have, if their captain's amongst them.'

As he said this, a little old man seated on the hatch-coaming, with a red nightcap on, immense earrings, and a face of leather puckered into a thousand wrinkles like the grin of a monkey, looked up at Mr Prance, and nodding with frightful energy whilst he struck his bosom with his clenched fist, cried out: 'Yash, yash, me capitaine.'

'Ha!' said the mate, 'do you speak English, then?'

'Yash, yash,' he roared: 'me speakee Angleesh.'

Happily he knew enough to save me the labour of interpreting; and *labour* it would have been with a vengeance, since, though it was perfectly certain none amongst them, saving

the little monkey-faced man, comprehended a syllable of the mate's questions, every time the small withered chap answered—which he did with extraordinary convulsions and a vast variety of frantic gesticulations—all the rest of them broke into speech, the women joining in, and there was such a hubbub of tongues that not an inch of idea could I have got out of the distracting row. However, in course of time the leathery manikin who called himself captain made Mr. Prance understand that the lugger belonged to Boulogne; that she had the survivors of another lugger on board, making some thirty-four souls in all, men and women, at the time of the collision, of which seventeen or eighteen were drowned. After he had given Mr. Prance these figures, he turned to the others and said something in a shrill, fierce, rapid voice, whereat the women fell to shrieking and weeping, whilst many of the men tore their hair, some going the length of knocking their heads against the cuddy front. It was a sight to sicken the heart, the more, I think, for the unutterable element of grotesque farce imported into that dismal tragedy by their countenances, postures, and behaviour; and having heard and seen enough,

I slipped away on to the poop, with a chill coming into my very soul to the thought of the drowned bodies out yonder when my eye went to the sea weltering black to the troubled line of moonshine, and heaving in ashen luminous billows in that chill path of light.

But long before this, our rockets, blue-lights, and flares had been seen; and a moment or two after I had gained the poop I spied the figure of Captain Keeling with a few male passengers at his side standing at the rail watching a powerful cutter thrashing through it to us close-hauled, with the water boiling to her leaps, and her big mainsail to midway high dark with the saturation of the flying brine. In less than twenty minutes she was rising and falling buoyant as a seabird abreast of us, with a shadowy figure at her lee rail bawling with lungs of brass to know what was wrong.

'I have run down a French lugger,' shouted Captain Keeling, 'and have half her people on board, and must put them ashore at once, for I wish to proceed.'

'Right y'are,' came from the cutter; but with a note of irritation and disappointment in the cry, as I could not but fancy.

Then followed some wonderful manœuvring. There was only one way of transshipping the miserable French people, and that was by a yardarm whip and a big basket. Hands sprang aloft to prepare the necessary tackle; Prance meanwhile, from the head of the poop ladder, thundered the intentions of the Indiaman through a speaking-trumpet to the cutter. I could see old Keeling stamp from time to time with impatience as he broke away from the questions of the passengers, one of whom was Colonel Bannister, into a sharp walk full of grief and irritability. Meanwhile they had shifted their helm aboard the cutter and got way upon the fine little craft. I saw her take the weight of the wind and heel down to the line of her gunwale, then break a dark sea into boiling milk, leaping the liquid acclivity as a horse takes a tall gate, burying herself nose under with the downwards launching rush, then soaring again to the height of the next billow with full way upon her. She came tearing and hissing through it as though her coppered forefoot were of red-hot metal, and when abreast of our lee quarter, put her helm down, and swept with marvellous grace and precision to alongside of us, clear of our shearing spars, and there she lay.

It was hard upon midnight when the last basket-load had been lowered on to her deck. There was no hitch; all went well; a line attached to the basket enabled the cutter's people to haul it fair to their decks; but the terror of the unfortunate Frenchmen was painful to see. The women got into the basket bravely; but many of the men blankly refused to enter, and had to be stowed in it by force, our Jacks holding on till the order to 'sway away' was given, when up would go poor Crapaud shrieking vengeance upon us all, and calling upon the Virgin and saints for help. In its way it was like a little engagement with an enemy. Some of the Frenchmen drew knives, and had to be knocked down.

Then, when the last of them was swayed over the side and lowered—'Are you all right?' shouted Captain Keeling to the cutter.

'All right,' responded a deep voice, hoarse with rum and weather. 'I suppose your owners'll make the job worth something to us?'

'Ay, ay,' answered the captain. 'Round with your topsail yard, Mr Prance. Lively now! this business has cost us half a night as it is.'

In a few minutes the great yards on the main were swung slowly to the drag of the braces with loud heave-yeos from the sailors, and the ship, feeling the weight of the wind in the vast dim hollow of the topsail, leaned with a new impulse of life in her frame and drove half an acre of foam ahead of her. We had resumed our voyage; and with a sense of supreme weariness in me following the excitement of the hours, and chilled to the marrow by my long spell on deck and incessant loiterings in the keen night-wind, I entered the saloon, called for a tumbler of grog, and made my way to my berth.

CHAPTER III

MY FELLOW PASSENGERS

It blew a hard breeze of wind that night. Soon after I had left the deck they furled the mainsail and topgallantsail, reefed the main-topsail, and tied another reef in the mizzen-topsail. In fact, it looked as if we were to have a black gale of wind, dead on end too, with a sure prospect then of bearing up for the Downs afresh. How it may be in these steamboat times, I will not pretend to say; but my experience of the old sailing-ship is that the first night out, let the weather be what it will, is, on the whole, about as wretched a time as a man at any period of his life has to pass through.

Mr. Colledge was sound asleep in his bunk, his brandy flask within convenient reach of his hand. It was certain enough that he had heard nothing of the disturbance on deck. I undressed and rolled into my bed, and there

lay wide awake for a long time. The ship creaked like a cradle. The full dismalness of a first night out was upon me, and it was made weightier yet—how much weightier indeed!—by the recollection of the wild and sudden tragedy of the evening. Oh, the insufferable weariness of the noises, the straining of the bulkheads, the yearning roar of the dark surge washing the porthole, with the boiling of it dying out into a dim simmering upon the wind, the instant stagger of the ship to the blow of some heavy sea full on her bow, the sensation of breathless descent as the vessel chopped down with a huge heave to windward into the trough, the pendulum swing of one's wearing apparel hanging against the bulkhead, the half-stifled exclamations breaking from adjacent cabins, the whole improved into a true oceanic flavour by the occasional hoarse songs of the sailors above, faintly heard, as though you were in a vault, and that strange vibratory humming which the wind makes to one hearkening to it out of the cabin of a ship.

I fell asleep at last, and was awakened at half-past seven by the steward, who wished to know if I wanted hot water to shave with.

The moment I had my consciousness, I was sensible that a heavy sea was running.

'No shaving this morning, thank you,' said I, 'unless I have a mind to slice the nose off my face. How's the weather, steward?'

'Blowing a buster from the south'ard, sir,' he answered, talking with his lips at the venetian of the closed door, 'and the ship going along 'andsomely as a roll of smoke.'

Here somebody called him, and he trotted away.

Mr. Colledge awoke. 'By George!' he exclaimed, 'I've had a doocid long sleep.'

'How d'ye feel?' said I.

'In no humour to rise,' he answered. 'I suppose I can have what breakfast I'm likely to eat brought to me here?'

'Bless you, yes,' I answered.

'Any news, Mr. Dugdale?' he asked, his voice beginning to languish as a sensation of nausea grew upon him with the larger awakening of his faculties.

'We ran down a French lugger last night,' said I, 'and drowned a lot of men. That's all.'

He eyed me dully, thinking perhaps that

I was joking, and then said: 'Well, there it is, you see. Yesterday, you were talking of the fun of a voyage; and the very earliest of the humours is the drowning of a lot of men.'

'And women,' said I.

'Poor devils!' he exclaimed. 'Will you hand me a bottle of Hungary water that you'll find in my portmanteau? Much obliged to you, Dugdale: and will you kindly tell the steward as you pass through the cabin to bring me a cup of tea?'

'Get up by-and-by, if you feel equal to it,' said I. 'Nursing sea-sickness only makes the demon more pitiless. Show yourself on deck, and the wind'll blow the nausea out of you. And I'll tell you a better cure than Hungary water or brandy flasks—a cube of salt-horse, Colledge; a hearty lump of marine beef, something to work up the muscles of your jaws, and to sharpen your teeth for you.'

'Oh gracious, my dear fellow—don't,' he exclaimed, turning his face to the wall of the ship; and I heard him exclaim, as though muttering to himself: 'How the water gurgles about this window, and what a doocid sickly green it is!'

But a very few of us assembled at the breakfast table. Colonel Bannister was there, a very ramrod of a man, with a Bengal-tigerish expression of face as he glared round about him from betwixt his white wire-like whiskers. There were also present Mr. Emmett, an artist, who was making the voyage to the East for the purpose of painting Indian scenery, a man with long hair curling down his back, a ragged beard and moustaches, a velvet coat, and Byronic collars, out of which his long thin neck forked up like the head of a pole through a scarecrow's suit of clothes; Mr. Peter Hemskirk, who looked uncommonly fat, pale, and unfinished in his attire this morning; two young Civil Service fellows—as we should now call their trade—named Greenhew and Fairthorne; and Mr. Sylvanus Johnson, a journalist, bound to Bombay or Calcutta (I cannot be sure of the city), to edit a newspaper—a bullet-headed man, with a sort of low-comedian face, very blue about the cheeks where he shaved, and small keen restless black eyes, full of intelligence, whose suggestion in that way was not to be impaired or weakened by an expression in repose of singular self-complacency. Captain Keeling, at

the head of the table, sat skewered up in his uniform frock-coat in stiff satin stock and collars. Mr. Prance occupied the other end of the table. He, too, was attired in a uniform resembling the dress worn by the skipper. He had a pleasant brown sailorly face, with a floating pose of head upon his shoulders that made one think of a soap-bubble poised on top of a pipe-stem. There were no ladies. Once I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Colonel Bannister's Roman nose, and grey hair ornamented with a large black lace cap, fitfully hovering for a moment or two in the wide hatch past the chief officer's chair, down which the steps led that went to the sleeping berths. But the apparition vanished with almost startling suddenness, as though the old lady had fallen or been violently pulled below. When, later on, I inquired after her, I learnt that he had betaken herself again to her bunk.

It was a mighty uncomfortable breakfast. The ship was rolling violently and convulsively upon the short snappish Channel seas —the most insufferable of all waters when in commotion, making even the seasoned salt pine for the long regular rhythmic heave of the blue ocean billow. The fiddles hindered

the plates from sliding on to our laps; but their contents were not to be so easily coaxed into keeping their place; an unusually heavy lurch shot a large helping of liver and bacon on to Mr. Hemskirk's knees; and the ship's surgeon, Dr. Hemmeridge, came perilously near to being badly scalded by Mr. Johnson, the literary man, who, in reaching for a cup of tea tilted the swinging tray. There was not much talk, and what little was said chiefly concerned the incident of the previous evening.

'Captain,' cried young Mr. Fairthorne in an effeminate voice—he was the gentleman, it seems, who last night had been calling upon anybody to smother the ayah—'whath to become of thothe poor Frenchmen?'

'Sir,' answered Captain Keeling in a manner as stiff as a marline-spike with his dislike of the subject, 'I do not know.'

'Frenchmen,' cried Colonel Bannister in a loud voice, as though he were directing the manœuvres of a company of Sepoys, 'are the hereditary enemies of our country, and it never can matter to a Briton what becomes of them.'

'Boot my tear sir,' remarked Mr. Hems-

kirk, 'you are a Briton, yes—and you are a Christian too, und der Franchman iss your broder.'

'My what?' roared the colonel. 'Tell ye what it is, Mr. Hemskirk: it is a good job that you cannot pronounce our language, otherwise you might happen sometimes, sir, to grow offensive.'

Mynheer, who seemed to have had some previous acquaintance with this little bomb-shell of a man, dried the grease upon his lips with a napkin, and cast a wink upon Mr. Greenhew, whose face of resentment at this familiarity caused me to break into such an immoderate fit of laughter that there was nothing for it but to bolt from the table.

I found a real Channel picture stretching round me when I gained the deck; a grey sky, lightened in places with a kind of suffusion of radiance that made one think of the rusty bronze lingering in the wake of an expired sunset. Saving these flaws of dull light, there was no break anywhere visible in the wide cold bald stare of heaven over our mastheads. The strong wind was a dry one, yet the horizon was thick with a look of rain all the way round; and out of the smother in

the south, the sea was rolling in heights of a dark green, rich with creaming foam, that somehow seemed to satisfy the eye, as though each frothing crest were a streak of sunshine. There was a smack half a mile to windward of us staggering along, and sinking and rising under a fragment of red mainsail; but there was nothing else to be seen in that way.

The wind was blowing free for us—almost dead abeam, indeed; and the *Countess Ida* was swarming through it in a manner to put a quicker beat into the heart at the first sight of the picture she made. The topgallantsail was set over the single-reefed maintopsail; the whole foresail was on her, and, with the other topsails and a staysail or two, was tearing the great ship through the short savage heapings of water with a power that made one think of steam as trifling by comparison. The forecastle was wet with flying spray. The galley chimney was smoking cheerily, and from all about the long-boat came hearty farmyard sounds of the grunting of pigs and the bleating of sheep and the cackling of hens. There was a gang of seamen at the pumps, and as they plied the brakes with nervous sinewy

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arms, their song chimed in with the gushing of the water flowing freely to the scuppers, and washing back again to their feet with every roll to windward. Other seamen were at work upon the carronades, or cleaning paint-work with scrubbing-brushes, or coiling gear away upon pins, and so on, and so on. It was after eight, and all hands were on deck, and a fine set of livelies they looked, spite of most of them being snugged up in black or yellow oil-skins. Ships went with full companies in those days, and but for the slenderness of our ordnance, it might have been easy to imagine one's self on board a man-of-war when one ran one's eyes over the decks of the *Countess Ida* and counted the crew, and marked the butcher and butcher's mates, the cook and *his* mates, the baker and *his* mates, the carpenter and *his* mates, coming and going, and making a very fair of the neighbourhood of the galley.

The second mate warmly clad paced the weather side of the poop, sending many a weatherly glance to seaward, with a frequent lifting of his eyes to the rounded iron-hard canvas; whilst against the brilliant white wake of the ship, roaring and boiling upwards

as it seemed, to the stoop of the Indiaman's huge square counter, the figures of the two sailors at the big wheel stood out clear-cut as cameos, with the broad brass band upon the circle dully reflecting a space of copperish light in the sky over the weather mizzen-topsail yardarm, and the newly polished hood of the binnacle gleaming as though sun-touched. A couple of midshipmen in pea-coats and brass buttons, curly headed young rogues, with a spirit of mischief bright in every glance they sent, patrolled the lee side of the poop; and up in the mizzen top were two more of them, with yet another long-legged fellow jockeying a spur of the crosstrees, with his loose trousers rattling like a flag; but what job he was upon I could not tell. The planks of this deck were as white as the trunk of a tree newly stripped of its bark. Four handsome quarter-boats swung at the davits. Along the rail on either hand went a row of hencoops, through the bars of which the heads of cocks and hens came and went in a winking sort of way, like a swift showing and withdrawing of red rags. On the rail, for a considerable distance, were stowed bundles of compressed hay, the scent

of which was a real puzzle to the nose, coming as it did through the hard sweep of the salt wind. The white skylights glistened through the intricacies of brass wire which shielded them. Abaft the wheel, on either side of it, their tompioned muzzles eyed blindly by the closed ports meant to receive them, were a couple of eighteen pounders; for in those days the Indiamen still went armed; not heavily, indeed, as in the war-times of an earlier period, but with artillery and small-arms enough to enable her to dispute with some promise of success with the picaroon who was still afloat, whose malignant flag the burnished waters of the Antilles yet reflected, and whose amiable company of assassins were as often to be met with under the African and South American heights as in the Channel of the Mozambique, or eastward yet on the broad surface of the Indian Ocean.

I crossed the deck to where Mr. Cocker was stumping, and asked him if he could tell me off what part of the English coast our ship now was.

'Drawing on to the Wight, sir,' he answered, with a sort of groping look in the

little moist blue eyes he turned over the lee bow into the thickness beyond.

'Well, we're blowing through it, anyway,' said I. 'I shouldn't have allowed these heels for any conceivable structure born with such bows as the *Countess Ida*. What is it?' I asked with a glance at the broad dazzle of yeast dancing and whipping and slinging off the Indiaman's tall side against the hurl of the weather surge.

'It'll be all eight,' answered the second officer: 'it would be ten had she worked herself loose of the grip of the stevedores. She wants the mainsail and foreto'garn'sail. These old buckets are manufactured to creak, and whilst they creak, they hold, it is said.'

His face crumpled up into a grin that made him look twenty years older under the thatch of his sou'-wester curling to his eyebrows, with the broad flaps over his ears like a nightcap for his sea-helmet to sit upon.

'Pray, Mr. Cocker,' said I, 'was any damage done to the ship by the collision last night?'

'There wasn't so much as a rope-yarn parted,' he answered. 'I looked to see the spritsail yard sprung, for it'll have been that

spar, I reckon, which dragged the lugger's masts overboard by the shrouds of them. But it's as sound as anything else aboard the ship.'

He shifted uneasily, as though to make off, and, turning my head, I spied the captain looking into the binnacle. So, having had already enough of the deck, I stepped below for a smoke in the cuddy recess, where I found Mr. Emmett in a long cloak, such as mysterious assassins and renegade noblemen used to wear at the Coburg Theatre, sucking at a large curled meerschaum pipe, and arguing on the subject of longitude with a little man almost a dwarf, an honest and highly intelligent pigmy, with the head of a giant supported on the legs of a boy of six, an amiable earnest little creature, with a trick of looking up wistfully into your face. His name was Richard Saunders: and I afterwards understood that he was proceeding to India on behalf of some Pharmaceutical Society, to collect information on and examples of Hindu and other medicines, drugs, charms, and so forth.

Well, all that day it continued to blow a very strong wind. The ship's plunging increased as the Channel opened under her bow and admitted something of the weight of the

Atlantic in the run of its seas. There was a constant sharp-shooting of spray forward over the forecastle, and the wet came sobbing along the lee scuppers to where the cuddy front checked it under the poop ladder. Very few of us assembled at lunch or at dinner.

During the progress of this last meal, Colonel Bannister left the table and went below, and after an interval, uprose through the hatch, with his large distinguished-looking wife holding on to him. Mynheer Peter Hemskirk, on seeing her, cried out: 'Ah, Meestrees Bannister, boot dot iss vot I call plooky!' and Mr. Johnson came near to breaking his neck whilst starting to his legs to stand as she passed. She took a chair next her husband, and sat grimly staring around her, her lips pale with the compression of them. She shook her head to every suggestion made by the steward, and then, being unable to hold out any longer, seized hold of her little ramrod of a husband and went staggering and rolling below with him. When he returned, he tossed down a glass of wine with an angry gesture and a fierce countenance, and looking at Hemskirk, cried out: 'I've a great respect for my wife, sir, and

she's a fine woman in every sense of the word —The Dutchman nodded.—'But,' continued the colonel, clenching his fist, 'if ever I go to sea with a woman again, be she wife, aunt, or grandmother, may I be poisoned for a lunatic, and my remains committed to the deep. This is the fourth time I've sworn it—my mind is now resolved!'

Out of all this sort of thing one could get a laugh here and there; but on the whole it was desperately weary work, and continued so till we had blown clear of soundings. Altogether, it was as ugly a down Channel run as any man would pray to be preserved from; the atmosphere grey, the seas a muddy green, the howling blast chill as a November morn, often darkening to a squall, that would sweep between the masts in horizontal lines of rain sparkling like steel, and with spite enough in the lancing of them to compel the strongest to turn his back. Now and again a lady passenger would show in the cuddy; but though there were some twenty-eight of us in all, not reckoning a couple of ayahs, and a Chinaman in the garb of his country, who acted as nurse to one Mrs. Trevor's baby, never once in those

days did above seven of us, barring the skipper and his mates, sit down to a meal.

The thick weather lay heavily upon the captain's mind, held him in fits of abstraction whilst at table, dismissed him after a brief sitting to the deck, and kept him heedful and taciturn whilst there. He had had one collision, and wanted no more; and you would notice how that tragedy had served him, by observing him when in the cuddy to prick up his ears to the least unusual noise on deck, to glance at the tell-tale compass over his head, as though it were the sun which he had been patiently waiting for a chance to 'shoot,' to swallow his food with impatient motions to the steward to bear a hand, and to bolt up the cabin steps without a smile or syllable of apology to us for quitting the table.

CHAPTER IV

LOUISE TEMPLE

But there came a change at last. Ushant was then many long leagues astern, and the night had been dark but quiet, with a long Biscayan swell brimming to our starboard quarter, and a play of sheet-lightning off the lee bow, and wind enough to send the India-man through it at some six knots with her royals and cross-jack furled and the weather clew of her mainsail up. This was as the picture showed when I went to bed at five bells—half-past ten—and on opening my eyes next morning I found the berth brilliant with sunshine, bulkhead and ceiling trembling to the glory rippling off the sea through the large round scuttle or porthole, and the action of the ship a stately gliding, with a slow long floating heave that raised no sound whatever of creak or straining, and that, after the long spell of tumblefication, was as

grateful to every sense and to all wearied bones as the firm unrocking surface of dry land.

Mr. Colledge was shaving himself. I lay eyeing him for a few minutes, admiring the handsome high-born looks of the youth, and thinking it was a pity that such manly beauty as his should lack the consecrating touch of an intellectual expression to parallel his physical graces. He saw me in the glass in which he was scraping himself.

'Good-morning, Dugdale. I feel all right again, d'ye know. I am going to eat my breakfast in the cuddy and then go on deck.'

'Glad to hear it,' said I, putting my legs over the side of the bunk.

'I suppose there'll be some girls about this morning,' said he. 'Who the dooce are the passengers, I wonder? Anybody very nice aboard, not counting that ripping young lady with the black eyes?'

'Nearly everybody's been as sea-sick as you,' said I; 'and the few who have put in an appearance are males—your friend Emmett, the fat Dutchman, and two or three others.'

'Oh, you mean Mynheer Hemskirk, the corpulent chap, whose voice sounds like that of a man inside a rum puncheon talking through the bunghole.'

I asked him if he could tell me anything about Miss Temple, the black-eyed lady.

'Some one told me at Gravesend,' he answered—'but I don't know who it was—that she's a daughter of Sir Conyers Temple. I think I've heard my father speak of him as a man he has hunted with. If he's that Sir Conyers, he broke his neck four years ago in a steeplechase.'

'Who accompanies the young lady to India, I wonder?' said I.

'Her aunt, I believe; but I don't know her name. But I say, though, what makes you so inquisitive?'

'Oh, my dear Colledge,' said I, 'one is always inquisitive about one's fellow-passengers on board ship. The girl came up to me on deck the other night when the row of the collision was in full swing. I see her big eyes now—black as ebony, yet luminous too, with the flame of a flare-tin at the side reflected in each magnificent orb in a spot of crimson which made her pale

hooded face as mystical as a vision of the night.'

He turned to stare at me, and broke into a laugh. 'So! *you* are the poet amongst the passengers, eh? as Emmett's the painter? What's to be *my* walk? Oh, there goes the first breakfast bell! Heaven bless us, what a delightful thing it is not to feel sea-sick!'

We continued to gabble a bit in this fashion; he then left the berth, and a little later I followed him.

The large cuddy wore an aspect it had not before exhibited. The sunshine sparkled upon the skylights, and the interior was full of the blue and silver radiance of the rich and welcome autumn morning outside. The long table was all aglow with the silver and crystal furniture of the white damask, and through the glazed domes in the upper deck you could see the canvas on the mizzen swelling in a milky softness from yard to yard as the sails mounted to the height of the tender little royal.

The passengers came from the deck or up from below one after another; the change in the weather had acted as a charm, and here now was the whole mob of us, one old lady

excepted, with a glimpse to be had of the two ayahs sunning themselves on the quarter-deck. The skipper, looking a bit stale, as with too much of all-night work, but smart enough in the gingerbread trickery of his uniform, made a little speech of compliments to the ladies and gentlemen from the head of the table. There was a courtliness about the old fellow that gained not a little in relish from a sort of deep-sea flavour in his manner and varying expressions of face. I liked the quality of the bow with which he accompanied his answer to any lady who addressed him.

I sat at the bottom of the table on the right hand of the chief-officer, and was able to command a pretty good view of the people that I was to be associated with, as I might suppose, for the next three or four, and perhaps five months. There were several girls amongst us—two Miss Joliffes, three Miss Brookes's, Miss Hudson, and four or five more. Miss Hudson was exceedingly pretty —hair of dark gold, and a skin delicate as a lily, upon which lay a kind of golden tinge —oh, call it not freckles! though I dare-say the charming effect was produced by

something of that sort. Her eyes were large, moist, violet in hue, with slightly lifted eyebrows, which gave them an arch look. Mr. Sylvanus Johnson, who sat next me, after staring at her a little, muttered in my ear in a dramatic undertone: 'Perdita has expressed that girl, sir:

> Violets dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
> Or Cytherea's breath.'

'If that be her mother next to her,' said I, 'fix your attention upon her, Mr. Johnson, and Perdita's fancy will exhale!'

And indeed Mrs. Hudson was a very extraordinary, and I may say violent contrast to her daughter: a pursy lady of about fifty, with a heavy underlip, puffed-out cheeks of a bluish tint, and a wig, the youthful hue of which defined every trace of age in her countenance, till one thought of her as being some score years older than she really was.

But the interior was wonderfully humanised by these ladies. Their dress, the sparkle of jewels in their ears, on their fingers and throats, here and there a turban seated high on some motherly head—it was the age of turbans and feathers—the soft notes of the

girls running an undertone of music through the deeper voices of the matrons and the growling of us males grumbling conversation across and up the table, whipped the fancy ashore, and made one think of drawing-rooms and guitars and Books of Beauty.

There was one lady, however, who held my eye from the start. She was Miss Louise Temple, and I cannot express how deep was the admiration her charms excited in me. I told you that I had caught a glimpse of her at Gravesend; but, down to this moment, I had been unable to obtain a fair view of her. Her hair that, to judge by the coils of it, when let down would have reached to below her knees, was of a wonderful blackness without either gloss or deadness. She wore it in a manner that was perfectly new in those days: in twinings which heaped it up to the aspect of a crown; whilst behind it was brushed up in a way to exhibit the lovely form of the head from the curve of the neck to where the beautiful tresses lay piled. Her face was perfectly colourless, the complexion clear, and the skin exquisitely delicate. Her mouth was small, the upper lip slightly curved, and there was the hint of a pout in the faint, scarce

perceptible protrusion of the under lip. Her nose was perfectly straight, like a Greek woman's; but it had the English indent under the brow, and therefore had the beauty, which to my fancy, no Greek profile ever yet possessed.

But her eyes! How am I to describe them? What impression can I hope to convey by such terms as large, black, soft, and fluid? The lids were delicately veined, the eyelashes long, and between these fringes the eyes shone of a dark liquid loveliness, full of the light, as it seemed to me, of a high intelligence, with spirit and haughtiness in every glance. They were the most dramatic, by which I do not mean theatric, pair of twinklers that ever sparkled star-like under the beauty of a woman's brow; created, you might have thought, for the interpretation of the Shakespearean imaginations, with all capacity in them of surprise, scorn, resentment, melting tenderness, and of every fine and noble passion. She was attired in a dress of black cloth, simple as a riding habit of to-day, and so fitting her figure as to express without exaggeration every point of grace in the curves and fulness of her tall but still maidenly form.

I caught her glance for a moment; I am sure she remembered me as the passenger she had addressed on the poop; yet there was not the faintest expression of recognition in the full, firm, swift stare she honoured me with. She looked away from me as haughtily as a queen, with flashing inspection of the others of the row of us that confronted her, though it seemed to me that her gaze lingered a little on the Honourable Mr. Colledge, who was seated immediately opposite.

'I reckon now,' whispered Mr. Prance, leaning to me in his chair from his athwartship post at the foot of the table, 'that yonder Miss Temple will be about the handsomest woman that was ever afloat.'

'There have been many thousands of women afloat,' said I, 'since Noah got under way with the ladies of his family aboard.'

'I have been sailing in passenger-ships,' said he, 'for nineteen years come next month, and have never before seen such a figure-head as Miss Temple's. What teeth she has! Little teeth, sir, as all women's should be; and where's the whiteness that's to be compared to them?'

'Who is that homely, pleasant-faced woman sitting by her side?'

'Her aunt, Mrs. Radcliffe,' he answered.

'What errand carries that stately creature to India, do you know, Mr. Prance?'

'I do not, sir.'

'Not very likely,' I continued, 'that she's bound out in search of a husband.'

'No, no,' he muttered. 'The like of her have a big enough market at home to command. No need for *her* to cross the ocean to find a sweetheart. She's the daughter of a dead baronet, a tenth title, so the captain was saying; and her mother has a large estate to live on. Captain Keeling knows all about them. Her ladyship was seized with paralysis when her husband was brought home with his neck broken, and has been a sheer hulk ever since, I believe, poor thing. We brought Mrs. Radcliffe to England last voyage. Her husband's a big planter up country, and worth a lac or two. I expect Miss Temple is going out on a visit—nothing more. Her health may need a voyage. Those choice bits of mechanism often go wrong in their works. She wants a stroke of colour in her cheeks. 'Tis the scent of the milkmaid that she lacks, sir.'

He gave a pleasant nod, quietly rose, and went on deck by way of the cuddy front, to relieve the second officer, who was watching the ship for him whilst he breakfasted.

At such a first meal as this, so to speak, when, barring one, we had all come together for the first time, there was no want of British reserve and shyness. We chiefly contented ourselves with staring. Colonel Bannister alone talked freely; he was loud on the subject of army grievances, and was rendered indeed, intolerably fluent and noisy by the respectful attention he received from a gentleman who sat over against him, one Mr. Hodder, a tall, thin, nervous, yellow-faced man, with a paralytic catching up of his breath in his speech, who was going to India to fill some post of responsibility in a college. Mrs. Bannister with her hawks-bill nose, grey hair, and full figure, sat bolt upright, eating with avidity, and sweeping the faces round about her with a small severe eye.

I watched little Mrs. Radcliffe with attention. It was not hard to guess that she was an amiable, fidgety, anxious body, of elastic properties of mind, easily, but only temporarily, to

be repressed. She talked in a quick way to her niece, darting what she had to say into the girl's ear, with an abrupt withdrawal of her head, and an earnest look at Miss Temple's face. The other would sometimes faintly smile, but for the most part her air was one of haughty abstraction. Indeed, it was easy to see that, so far as her opinion of her fellow-passengers went, it was not quite flattering to the bulk of us.

It was a noble morning, indeed, on deck. There was a long blue heave of swell from the northward, quiet as the rise and fall of a sleeper's breast, and the white buttons of the ship's trucks, glancing like silver against the moist blue of the sky, swung so slowly and tenderly to and fro that one could almost watch them without perception of any movement. The ocean was of a deep sea blue, all to eastward flashing under the sun, and the small waves chased us with a voice of summer in the caressing seething of the snow of their heads against the sides of the Indiaman. The ship had studdingsails set, and under these far overhanging wings the water trembled back the radiance that fell from the swelling cloths, as though there were a floating thin-

ness of quicksilver there prismatic as a soap-bubble.

Very soon after breakfast the poop was filled, and I marked the Jacks forward staring aft at the sight of us all. It was not hot enough for an awning, and there was still too much edge in the breeze, warmly as the sun looked down, to suffer the ladies to sit for any length of time. The picture was a cheerful one, full of movement and life and colour. The white-headed skipper, skewered up in his bebuttoned and belaced frock-coat, patrolled the weather side of the deck with Mrs. Radcliffe on his arm. Mr. Emmett paced the planks with Mrs. Joliffe and her daughters, and I could hear him bidding them admire the contrast between the violet shadowing in the hollows of the sails and the delicate sheen of the edges against the blue, as though at those extremities they dissolved into pure lustre. Little Mr. Saunders trotted alongside the orbicular form of Mynheer Hemskirk, who showed as a giant as he looked down into the earnest upstaring face of the big-headed little chap. Three Civil Service youths lounged upon a hencoop, looking askant at the young ladies, and laughing under their breaths

at what one or another of them said. Near the foremost skylight stood Mr. Johnson and Colonel Bannister. One did not need to listen attentively to understand that the colonel was falling foul of the calling of journalism, and that Mr. Johnson was endeavouring to defend it by repeating over and over again: 'Granted—I admit it—I'm not going to say no; but give me leave to ask, where on earth would your profession be, sir, if its actions were not chronicled?' These remarks he continued to reiterate till the colonel was in a white heat, and I had to walk away to conceal my laughter.

As I passed the companion hatchway, which you will please to understand is the hooded entrance to the cuddy by way of the poop, Miss Temple came up out of it, closely followed by Mr. Colledge. There was something like a smile on her pale face, and he was talking with animation. She wore a black hat, wide at the brim, with a large black feather encircling it, and a sort of jacket with some rich trimming of dark fur upon it. I was close enough to overhear them as they emerged.

'I quite remember my dear father speak-

ing of Lord Sandown,' she said, coming to a stand at the head of the companion steps, and sending a sparkling sweeping look along the decks. 'Is not Lady Isabella FitzJames an aunt of yours, Mr. Colledge?'

'Oh yes. I hope you don't know her,' he answered. 'She writes books, you know, and fancies herself a wit; and her conversation is as parching as the seedcake she used to give me when I was a boy.'

'I have met her,' said Miss Temple. 'I rather liked her. Perhaps she neglects to be clever in the company of her own sex.'

'Ever been to India before?' he asked.

'No,' she answered in a voice whose note of affability somehow by no means softened her haughty regard of the passengers as they walked past. 'I am entirely obliging my aunt by undertaking the trip. My uncle is very old, and too infirm to make the passage to England, and he was extremely anxious for my mother and me to spend some months with him. Of course it was a ridiculous invitation as far as poor mamma is concerned. You know she is a helpless cripple, Mr. Colledge.'

'Oh, indeed. I didn't know. I am very sorry, I'm sure,' said he.

'I shall not remain long,' she continued; 'most probably I shall return in this ship.'

'By George, though, I hope you will!' he exclaimed. 'I'm booked to come home in her too. There'll be more shooting in three months than I shall want, you know. I mean to pot a few tigers, and try my hand on a wild elephant or two. By Jove, Miss Temple, if you'll allow me, you shall have the skin of the first tiger I shoot!'

'Oh, you are too good, Mr. Colledge,' said she, with a smile trembling on her parted lips, lifting her hand as she spoke to smooth a streak of hair off her forehead with fingers that sparkled with rings; but her eyes were brighter than any of her gems; they turned at that instant full upon me as I stood looking at her a little way past the mizzen-mast, and there seemed something of positive insolence in the brief stare she fixed upon me; the faint smile vanished to the curl of her upper lip as she turned her head.

That, my fine madam, thought I, may be your manner of regarding everything which is not to be found in the Peerage.

Colledge, who had followed her glance, saw me.

'Oh, Dugdale,' he cried, 'can you tell me anything about tigers' skins—how long it takes to doctor them into rugs and all that sort of thing, don't you know?'

'I can tell you nothing about tigers' skins,' said I curtly. 'I have never seen a tiger.'

'Know anything about lions' skins, then?' he sung out with a half-smile, meant, as my temper fancied, for Miss Temple.

'The ass in the fable clothed himself in one, I believe,' said I, 'but his roar betrayed him.'

'Now I come to think of it,' said he, 'I believe there are no lions in India;' and he looked from me to the girl with a face of interrogation so full of good temper as to satisfy me that at heart he was a kindly-natured young fellow.

'I think I shall walk, Mr. Colledge,' said Miss Temple.

They joined the folks promenading the weather-deck, and I went to the recess under the poop to smoke a pipe.

I leaned in a sulky mood against the bulkhead. There was a sense upon me as of

having been snubbed. I was a young man in those days, of an uncomfortably sensitive disposition. Yet there should have been virtue enough in that glorious morning to soothe in one's soul a keener sting than was to be inflicted by a handsome woman's scornful glance. The slight leaning away of the ship from the soft breeze showed a space over the bulwark rails of the sparkling azure under the sun steeping to the delicate silver blue of the sky, with a small star-like point of white in the far-off airy dazzle, marking the topmost cloths of a ship out there. The white planks under my feet had the glistening look of sand, now that the decks had been washed down, and had dried out into a frosting of themselves, as it were, with tiny crystals of brine. The shadows of the rigging in ink-black lines swung sleepily to the motion of the fabric. The Chinaman nurse, in a gown of blue, and wide blue trousers, and primrose-coloured face, and a gleaming tail like a dead black serpent lying down his back, leaned against a carronade, tossing the little baby he had charge of till the plump little sweet crowed again with delight. On the warm tarpaulin over the main-hatch sat the two ayahs, crooning over the infants they

held, often lifting their eyes, like beads of unpolished indigo stuck into slips of mottled soap, to the poop, where the mothers of their youngsters were. There was a taste as of a hubble-bubble in the air, with the faint relish of bamboo chafing-gear and cocoa-nut ropes. The hubble-bubble, I daresay, was a fancy wrought by the spectacle of those black faces, and helped by a noise of parrots somewhere aft.

A length of sail was stretched along the waist, and upon it were seated several sailors, flourishing palms and needles as they stitched. They talked together in a low voice that the mate of the watch should not hear them. At one of the fellows who sat with his face towards me, I found myself looking as at a curiosity that slowly compels the attention, spite of any heedless mood you may be in. Many ugly mariners had I met in my time, but never the like of that man. His right eye had a lamentable cast; his back was so round that I imagined he had a hunch. He had enormously long strong arms, with immense fists at the ends of them, and the sleeves of his shirt being rolled to above his elbow exposed a score of extraordinary devices in Indian ink writhing

amongst the hair that lay in places like fur upon the flesh. The bridge of his nose had been crushed to his face, and a mere knob with two holes in it stood out about an inch above his hare-lip. Though manifestly an old sailor, salted down for ship's use by years of seafaring, his complexion was dingy and dough-like as the skin of a London baker, with nothing distinctive upon it saving a number of warts, and a huge mole over a ridge of scarlet eyebrow dashed with a few grey hairs. His hair, that was of coarse brick-red, hung down upon his back, as though, forsooth, the ship's cook had made a wig for him out of the parings of carrots. Indeed, he was as much a monster as anything that was ever shut up in a cage and carried about as a show.

I was watching him with growing interest, wondering to myself what sort of a life such a creature as that had led, what kind of ships he had sailed in chiefly, and how so grotesque an object had been suffered to 'sign on' for an Indiaman, in which one might expect to find something of a man-of-war uniformity and smartness of crew, when Mr. Sylvanus Johnson came out from the cuddy, rolling an unlighted cheroot betwixt his lips.

'See that chap sitting upon the sail yonder?' said I—'a good subject for a leading article, Mr. Johnson.'

'Oh confound it, Mr. Dugdale; no sneers, if you please. Let me light this cigar at your pipe. That fellow is in Emmett's way, not mine. Quite a triumph of hideousness, I protest. But what's the matter with you, this lovely morning? You look a bit down in the mouth, Mr. Dugdale. Not going to be sea-sick, I hope, now that all the rest of us have recovered?'

'Down in the mouth? Not I. But I'll tell you what, Mr. Johnson—when you take charge of your newspaper, will you be so good as to inform the world that there is nothing under the broad sky more consumedly insipid than the chattering of a young man and a young woman when they first meet.'

'Why, how now?' said he.

'Oh, my dear sir,' cried I, 'hear them. The unspeakable drivel of it—the 'reallys' and 'oh dears' and 'yes quites'—

'Yes,' said Mr. Johnson looking at the ash of his cigar after every puff; 'I think I know what you mean. But it is the effect of politeness, I believe. A young gentleman and a young lady who desire to please will begin

very low with each other, lest they should prove disconcerting. But what d'ye say'—he lowered his voice—'to the drivel, as you call it, of a man of advanced years?'—here he looked into the cuddy, then took a step forward to peer up at the poop—'of a person who has seen the world—of a colonel, in short? I wish to be on good terms with my fellow-passengers; but if that man Bannister goes on as he has begun, I'm afraid—I'm afraid it will end in my having to pull his nose.'

He sent another nervous look into the cuddy and frowned upon his cigar end.

'Has he been offensive?' said I.

'Well, judge,' he exclaimed, 'when I tell you that he said there wasn't a respectable man connected with journalism; that the calling was distinctly a tipsy one; that his idea of a journalist was that of a man lying in bed till his only shirt came from the wash, and inventing lies to publish to the world when the washerwoman enabled him to clothe himself. —"And pray, sir," said I, sneering at him, "what would the country know of your military achievements if it were not for the journalist? You army gentlemen profess to despise him; but you will get up very early

to buy his paper if you have a notion that there will be any mention of your doings in it."—That was pretty warm, I think?'

'Rather,' said I; 'and what did he say?'

'He answered that if any other man but myself had said as much, he would have told him to go and be damned.'

'Well,' said I, 'I hope the passengers may prove a companionable body, I am sure. For my part, it is more likely than not that my place of abode whilst the weather permits will be the foretop. Anything to escape overhearing the insipidity of a chat between a young man and a young woman when they first meet.'

'I see,' said he, 'that your friend Colledge has hooked himself on to Miss Temple. I should say he needs to be the son of a nobleman to make headway with such a Cleopatra as her ladyship. Fine eyes, perhaps; but a little pale, eh? Give me Miss Hudson. I don't admire the sneering part of the sex.'

'Nor I,' said I.

'But every woman,' said he, 'has a way of her own of making love. Some simper themselves into a man's affection, and some triumph by scorn and contempt. Do you re-

member how the Duchess of Cleveland made love to Wycherley? She put her head out of the coach window and cried out to him: "Sir, you're a rascal, you're a villain!" and Pope tells us that Wycherley from that moment entertained hopes.'

But by this time my pipe was smoked out; and catching sight of Mynheer Hemskirk and a passenger named Adams, a lawyer, coming down the ladder with the notion as I might guess of joining us in the recess that was the one smoking-room of the ship, I bolted forwards, got upon the forecastle, and overhung the rail, where I lay for a long half-hour lazily enjoying the sight of the massive cutwater of the Indiaman rending the brilliant blue surface, with a clear lift of azure water either hand of her, that broke into a little running stream of foam abreast of the catheads, and swarmed quietly aft in foam-bells and winking bubbles, that made one think of the froth at the foot of a cascade gliding along the crystal-clear breast of a stream to the murmur of summer leaves and the horn-like hum of insects.

CHAPTER V

A MYSTERIOUS VOICE

WELL, all that day the weather held fine and clear; indeed, we might have been on the Madeira parallels; and I said to Mr. Prance that it was enough to make one keep a bright look-out for the flying fish. The sky was of a wonderful softness of blue, piebald in the main, with small snow-like puffs of cloud flying low, as though they were a fog that had broken up. A large black ship passed us in the afternoon. She was close hauled, and, being to leeward, showed to perfection when she came abreast. Her sails seemed to be formed of cotton cloth, and mounted in three spires to little skysails, with a crowd of fleecy jibs curving at the bowsprit and jib-booms, and many stay-sails between the masts softly shadowed like a drawing in pencil. The lustre lifting off the sea was reverberated in a row of scuttles, and the flash of the glass was

so like the yellow blaze of a gun that you started to the sight, and strained your ear an instant for the report.

She was too far off to hail. The captain, standing in the midst of a crowd of ladies, said that she was an American, and told the second officer, who had the watch, to make the *Countess Ida's* number.

'Oh, what a lovely string of flags!' exclaimed Miss Hudson, who stood near me, following with her languishing violet eyes the soaring of the mani-coloured bunting as it rose to the block of the peak signal halliards like the tail of a kite. 'Is there anybody very important in that ship that we are honouring him with that pretty display?'

'No,' said I, laughing, as I let my gaze sink fair into the sweet depths of her wonderful peepers. 'By means of those flags the *Countess Ida* is telling yonder craft who she is, so that when she arrives home she may report us.'

'Oh, how heavenly! Only think of a ship being made to tell her name! Oh mamma, she cried, making a step to catch hold of her mother's gown, and to give it a tweak, as the old lady stood at the rail gazing at the Ameri-

can vessel from the ambush of a large bonnet, shaped like a coal-scuttle; 'imagine, dear: Mr. Dugdale says that the *Countess Ida* is telling that ship who she is. How clever men are—particularly sailors. I love sailors.'

Her melting eyes sought the deck, and the long lashes drooped in a tender shadow of beauty upon the faint golden tinge of her cheeks.

'La, now, to think of it!' cried Mrs. Hudson. 'Well, those who go down into the sea, as the saying is, do certainly see some wonderful things.'

Here Mr. Colledge, who did not know, I suppose, that I was conversing with these ladies, came up to me and said: 'By the way, Dugdale, what was that joke of yours about the lion's skin this morning? Miss Temple says it was meant for a joke; but hang me if I can see any point in it.'

'What did I say?' I asked.

He repeated the remark.

'Oh, yes; the young lady is right,' said I, sending a look at her as she stood near the wheel by her aunt's side—the pair of them well away from the rest of us—gazing through a pair of delicate little opera glasses at the

Yankee; 'it was a joke. What a capital memory you have. But as to point, it had none, and the joke, my dear fellow, lies in that.'

'Well,' said he, 'it makes a man feel like an ass to miss a good thing when a lady is standing by who can see it clearly enough to laugh at it afterwards.'

'Yes,' I exclaimed; 'very true indeed. What a fine picture that ship makes, eh? There goes her answering pennant! Let them say what they will of Jonathan, he has a trick high above the art of John Bull in ship-building.'

I watched his handsome face as he peered at her. He turned to me and said: 'D'ye know, there's a doocid lot of humour in the idea of the point of a joke lying in its having no point;' and with that he went over to Miss Temple, whose haughty face softened into a smile to his approach; and there for some time the three of them stood, he ogling the American (that was slowly slipping into toy-like dimensions upon our quarter) through the girl's binocular; whilst she talked with him, as I could tell by the movement of her lips, Mrs. Radcliffe meanwhile looking on with

fidgety motions of her head, and frequent glances at her niece, the nervous interrogative slightly troubled character of which was as suggestive to me as to how it stood between them, as if she had come to my side and whipped out that she was really afraid that Louise's character would make the charge of her a worry and a perplexity.

There was a noble sunset that evening. In the west lay stretched a delicate curtain of cloud linked in shapes of shell, with dashes here and there as of mare's tails; whilst near the sea-line the vapour was more compacted, still linked, but with a closer inwreathing, as like to chain armour as anything I can compare it to. When the sun sank into this exquisite lace of vapour, it lighted up a hundred colours all over it, which transformed the whole of the western heavens into a most gorgeous and dazzling tapestry. Never saw I before the like of such a sunset. But for the visible circle of the glowing mass of the orb, you would have thought those glorious shooting hues, those astonishing and sumptuous emissions of green and gold and purple, of rose and brilliant yellow and shining blue fainting into an unimaginably delicate texture of green,

some phenomenal exhibition of electric splendour. The sea glowed under this vast display of western magnificence in fifty superb hues. We all stood looking, whilst the wondrous pageant slowly faded, the ship meanwhile reflecting the splendour in her sails till they showed like yellow satin against the soft evening blue gathering over the mastheads, as she pushed softly through the water, the oil-smooth surface of her wake lined with the spume broken out by the passage of her bows lifting tenderly on the swell that was flowing in long lines to the ship from out of the north-west.

The moon rose late, but it was a fine clear starlit dusk when eight bells of the second dog-watch floated along the decks and echoed quietly down out of the wind-hushed spaces of the canvas. The sea swept black to its confines where the low wheeling stars were hovering like ships' lights in the immeasurable distance. The radiance of the cuddy lamps flung a sheen upon the quarter-deck atmosphere; but away forward from abreast of the mainmast the ship lay black in the shadow of her own canvas, with a view of a few dark blotches of the forms of men moving about

the forecastle, their figures showing out against the brilliant dust in the sky under the wide yawn of the fore-course.

Old Keeling was pacing the deck with studding-sails out on both sides, as Jack says, that is to say, with a lady on either arm. Other figures moved here and there ; and Mr. Cocker, who had charge of the deck, walked to and fro from rail to rail with the young fourth officer by his side, regularly pausing, ere swinging round for the stump back, to take a peep under the foot of the mainsail or to send a long look into the weather horizon. Little Mr. Saunders came up to me, spoke of the beauty of the evening, and asked me to walk. He was a very intelligent little chap, and had written several works on the superstitions of various peoples in relation to their treatment of diseases. He was wonderfully in earnest in all he said, and would again and again in his enthusiasm come to a stand, raise his arm to catch hold of a button of my coat, as if to detain me, meanwhile standing on the tips of his toes and peering up into my face. On the other side of the deck walked my friend Colledge between Miss Temple and her aunt. Three of the Civil Service gentlemen

were in tow of Mrs. Brookes and her daughters; and right aft, leaning in picturesque attitude against one of the guns, was Mr. Sylvanus Johnson airily and in a gallant tone of voice explaining to Mrs. and Miss Hudson how it was that the sun and moon were sometimes to be seen shining together. Down in the cuddy, directly under the after-skylight, sat Colonel Bannister playing whist with his wife, Mr. Hodder, and Mr Adams; and almost every time I passed I could hear the military man's voice remonstrating with one or the other of them for having played such or such a card: 'You should have led the knave, sir. What on earth, my dear, made you trump spades? No, no; I was right! I believe I am not to be taught whist at my time of life, sir;' and so on, and so on.

By-and-by a bell rang to summon the passengers below to such refreshments of wine and biscuits and strong waters as they chose to partake of. The promenaders in shadowy forms melted down the companion hatchway, and two or three of us only remained on deck. Mr. Colledge was one of them. He came over to me, staring in my face, to make sure of me, and exclaimed: 'I wish they would allow a

man to smoke up here. What is the evil in a pipe of tobacco or a cheroot, that you must go and sneak into a dark corner to light it?'

'How is it that you are not below with Miss Temple?' said I.

'Oh,' said he, laughing, 'I want to make her last me out the voyage, and that won't be done, you know, if we see too much of each other.'

'You are to be congratulated,' said I, 'on the compliment she pays you:

> Favours to none, to none she smiles extends;
> Oft she rejects, and oftener still offends.

That's not exactly how the poet puts it, but it is apter than the original.'

'Oh well, you know, Dugdale, she has met some of my people. I don't dislike her for holding off. It shows that her blood and instincts are English; though, faith, when I first saw her I took her to be a Spaniard. Between you and me, though, the golden headed girl's the belle of the ship. What's her name?—Ah! Miss Hudson. Look at her as she sits in the light down there! Why, now, if I had your poetical turn, how would I spout whole yards about her fingers like

snowflakes, and her lips like—— But see here! there's nothing new in the shape of imagery to apply to a pretty woman. Oh yes! Miss Hudson's the ship's beauty. But Miss Temple is ripping company, and, my stars! what eyes!'

'Take care,' said I, laughing, 'that you don't do what the man who marries the deceased wife's sister always does—wed the wrong one. Choose correctly at the start.'

He burst into a laugh.

'I am already engaged to be married,' said he. 'What single man of judgment would dare adventure a voyage to Bombay without securing himself in that fashion against all risks?'

I stared into his grinning face, as we stood at the skylight, to discover if he was in earnest.

'Keep your secret, Colledge,' said I; 'I'll not peach.'

Here the second-mate interrupted us by singing out an order to the watch to haul down the fore and main topgallant studding-sails. Then he took in his lower and main topmast studdingsails. The men's noisy bawling made talking difficult, and Colledge went

below for a glass of brandy-and-water. Presently old Keeling came on deck, and after a look around, and a pretty long stare over the weather bow, where there was a very faint show of lightning, he said something to the second mate and returned to the cuddy.

'In foretopmast studdingsail!' bawled Mr. Cocker; 'clew up the mizzen-royal and furl it.'

A little group of midshipmen hovering in the dusk in the lee of the break of the poop, where the shadow of the great mainsail lay like the darkness of a thunderstorm upon the air, rushed to the mizzen rigging, and in a few moments the gossamer-like cloud floating under the mizzen-royal truck was melting out like a streak of vapour against the stars, with a couple of the young lads making the shrouds dance as they clawed their way up the ratlines.

'What's wrong with the weather, Mr. Cocker,' said I, 'that you are denuding the ship in this fashion?'

'Oh,' said he with a short laugh, 'Captain Keeling is a very cautious commander, sir. He'll never show a stun'sail to the night outside the tropics; and it is a regular business

with us to furl the fore and mizzen royal in the second dog-watch, though it is so fine to-night, he has let them fly longer than usual.'

'Humph!' said I; 'no wonder he's popular with lady passengers. I suppose there is no chance of the ship falling overboard with the main-royal still on her?'

'When it comes to my getting command,' said he, 'the world will find that I am for carrying on. What my ship can't carry, she'll have to drag. I've made my calculations, and there's nothing with decent heels that shouldn't be able to make the voyage to India in seventy-five days. It is the trick of wind-jamming that stops us all. A skipper'll sweat his yards fore and aft sooner than be off his course by the fraction of a point. For my part, I'd make every foul wind a fair one.'

He called out some order to the group of shadows at work upon the lower studdingsail, and I went to the skylight with half a mind in me to go below and see what was doing there; but changed my intention when I saw friend Colledge leaning over a draughtboard with Miss Temple, Miss Hudson looking on at the game from the opposite side, and Mr. Johnson drawing diagrams with his forefinger to Mrs.

Hudson in explanation of something I suppose that he was talking about.

I went right aft and sat myself upon a little bit of grating abaft the wheel, and there, spite of the adjacency of the man at the helm, I felt as much alone as if I had mastheaded myself. The great body of the Indiaman went away from me in a dark heap; the white deck of the poop was a mere faintness betwixt the rails. Her canvas rose in phantasmal ashen outlines, with a slow swing of stars betwixt the squares of the rigging, and a frequent flashing of meteors on high sailing amongst the luminaries in streaks of glittering dust. There was little more to be heard than the chafe of the tiller gear in its leading blocks, the occasional dim noise of a rope straining to the quiet lift of the Indiaman, the bubbling of water going away in holes and eddies from the huge rudder, and a dull tinkling of the piano in the saloon, and some lady singing to it.

All at once I spied the figure of a man dancing down the main shrouds in red-hot haste. I was going in a lounging way forward at the moment, and heard Mr. Cocker say: 'What the deuce is it?' The fellow standing

on a ratline a little above the bulwark rail made some answer.

'You are mad,' cried the mate. 'What *are* you—an Irishman?'

'No, sir.' I had now drawn close enough to catch what was said. 'If I was, maybe I'd be a Papish, and then the sign of the cross would exercise [exorcise, I presume] the blooming voice overboard.'

'Voice in your eye!' cried Mr. Cocker. 'Up again with you! This is some new dodge for skulking. But you'll have to invent something better than a ghost before you knock off on any job you're upon aboard this ship.'

'What is it, sir?' called the voice of the captain from the companion, and he came marching up to us in his buttoned-up way, as though he sought to neutralise the trick of a deep sea roll by a soldierly posture.

'Why, sir,' answered Mr. Cocker, 'this man here has come down from aloft with a run to tell me that there's a ghost talking to him upon the topsail yard.'

'A what?' cried the captain.

'I 'splained it to the second officer as a voice, sir,' said the man, speaking very respect-

fully, but emphatically, as one talking out of a conviction.

'What did this voice say?' said the captain.

'I was mounting the topmast rigging,' replied the man, 'and my head was on a level with the tawps'l yard, when a woice broke into a sort of raw "haw-haw," and says, "What d'ye want?" it says. "Hook it!" it says. "I know you." So down I come.'

'Anybody skylarking up there, Mr. Cocker?'

The mate looked up with his hand to the side of his mouth. 'Aloft there!' he bawled; 'anybody on the topsail yard?'

We all strained our ears, staring intently, but no response came, and there was nothing to be seen. Dark as the shadow of the night was up in the loom of the squares of canvas, it was not so black but that a human figure might have been seen up in it after some searching with the gaze.

'It's your imagination, my man,' said the captain, half-turning as though to walk aft.

'Up aloft with you again, now!' exclaimed the second-mate.

'By thunder, then,' cried the man, smiting

the ratline with his fist, whilst he clipped hold of it with the other, swinging out and staring up, 'I'd rather go into irons for the rest of the voyage!'

By this time a number of the watch on deck had gathered about the main-hatchway, and stood in a huddle in the obscurity, listening to what was going forward. On a sudden a fellow leapt out of the group and sprang into the main rigging.

He hove some curses under his breath at the seaman, who continued to hang in the shrouds, and went aloft, hand over fist, as good as disappearing to the eye as he climbed into the big main top. The other man put his foot on to the rail and dropped on to the deck, where some of the sailors began eagerly in hoarse hurried whispers to question him.

'Well, what d'ye see?' shouted Mr. Cocker, sending his voice fair into the full heart of the high glooming topsail.

There was no answer; but a few seconds later I spied the dark form of the man swing off the rigging on to the topmast backstay, down which he slided in headlong speed. He jumped on to the poop ladder and roared out: 'By holy Moses, then, sir, it's the devil him-

self! There's no man to be seen, and yet a man there is!'

'And what did he say?'

'Why,' he cried, wiping the sweat off his brow, 'Blast me, here he is again!'

The brief pause that followed showed the captain as well as the second-mate, to be not a little astonished. In fact, the fellow was one of the boatswain's mates, a bushy whiskered giant of a sailor, assuredly not of a kind to connive at any Jack's horse-play or tomfoolery in his watch on deck and under the eye of the officer in charge. The captain sent one of the midshipmen for his binocular glass, the second mate meanwhile staggering back a few paces to stare aloft. But there was no magic in the skipper's lenses to resolve the conundrum. Indeed, I reckoned my own eyes to be as good as any glasses for such an inspection as that; but view the swelling heights as I would, going from one part of the deck to another, that no fathom of the length of the yards should escape me, I could witness nothing resembling a human shape, nothing whatever with the least stir of life in it.

'Well, this beats my time!' said Mr Cocker, drawing a deep breath.

'What sort of voice was it?' demanded Captain Keeling, letting fall the binocular with which he had been sweeping the fabric of spar and sail, and coming to the brass rail overlooking the quarter-deck.

The first of the two men who had been terrified cried out from the group near the hatchway, before the other could answer: 'It was exactly like the voice of Punch, sir, in the Judy show.'

'Then there *must* be a pair of 'em!' roared the other fellow with great excitement. 'What I heard was like a drunken old man swearing in his sleep.'

'Captain,' said I, stepping forward, 'let me go aloft, will you? I've long wanted to believe in ghosts, and here is a chance now for me to embark in that faith.'

'Ghosts, Mr Dugdale? Yet it is an extraordinary business too. There has been nothing to hear from the deck, has there?'

'Nothing, sir,' answered Mr. Cocker. 'But, Mr. Dugdale, if you will take the weather rigging, I'll slip up to leeward; and it'll be strange if between us we don't let the life out of the wonder, be it what it will.'

I jumped at once into the weather shrouds,

and was promptly travelling aloft with the sight of the figure of the second mate in the rigging abreast clawing the ratlines, and the frog-like spread of his legs showing out against the faintness of the space of the mainsail behind him. We came together in the maintop, and there stood looking up and listening a minute.

'I see nothing,' said I.

'Nor I,' said the second mate.

We peered carefully round us, then got into the topmast rigging and climbed to the level of the topsail yard, where we waited for the wonderful voice to address us; but nothing spoke, nor was there anything to be seen.

'Those two sailors must have fallen crazy,' said I.

'There's no need to go any higher,' said Mr. Cocker; 'the topgallant and royal yards lie clear as rules against the stars. On deck there!'

'Hallo?' came the voice of the captain, floating up in a sort of echo from the hull of the ship, that looked a mile down in that gloom.

'There's nothing up here for a voice to come out of, sir.'

'Then you had better come down, sir,' called

the captain; and I thought I could hear a little note of laughter below, as though two or three passengers had collected.

Mr. Cocker's vague form melted over the top; but I lingered a minute to survey the picture. My head was close against the main-topmast crosstrees, a height of some eighty or ninety feet above the line of the ship's rail, with the distance of the vessel's side from the water's edge to add on to it. I lingered but a minute or two, yet in that brief space the shadowy night-scene, with the grand cathedral-like figure of the noble craft sailing along in the heart of it, was swept into me with such vehemence of impression that the scene lies upon my memory clear now as it then was in that far-off, that very far-off, time. Every sound on deck rose with a subdued thin tone, as though from some elfin world. There was a delicate throbbing of green fire in the black water as it washed slowly past the lazy sides of the *Countess Ida*, and upon this visionary, faintly-glittering surface the form of the great ship was shadowily depictured, with the glim mer of the deck of the poop dimly dashed with the illuminated squares of the sky-lights, and a point of scarce determinable radiance

confronting the wheel where the binnacle light was showing. The ocean night-breeze sighed with a note of surf heard from afar in the quiet hollows of the canvas. There was sometimes a little light pattering of the reef-points, resembling the noise of the falling of a brief summer thunder-shower upon fallen leaves. The sea spread as vast as the sky, and you seemed to be able to pierce to the other side of the world, so infinitely distant did the stars close to the horizon look, as though *there* they were shining over an antipodean land.

'Aloft there, Mr. Dugdale!' came dimly sounding from the deck; 'do you hear anything more of the voice?'

'No,' I answered; but the cry had broken the spell that was upon me, and down I went, looking narrowly about me as I descended.

I had scarcely gained the poop when there was a commotion on the quarter-deck, and I heard the voice of the Chinaman exclaiming: 'What sailor-man hab seen Prince? What sailor-man, I say, hab seen him? Him gone for lost, I say? Oh—ai—O; Oh—ai—O! Him gone for lost, I say?'

'Who in thunder is making that row?' shouted Mr Cocker, putting his head over the brass rail.

The Chinaman stepped out from under the recess, and the cabin lights showed him up plainly enough. He wrung his hands and executed a variety of piteous gestures whilst he cried: 'Oh sah, did you sabbe Prince? Him gone for lost, I say! Oh—ai—O! Oh—ai—O! Him gone for lost, I say!' And here he rolled his eyes up aloft and over the bulwarks, and then made as if he would rush forwards.

'Is that you, Handcock?' said Mr Cocker, addressing a stout man who stepped out of the cuddy at that moment.

'Yes, sir,' answered the fellow, who was indeed the head steward.

'What's the matter with that Chinese idiot?'

'Why, sir, his mistress's parrot has escaped. He is responsible for the safe-keeping of the fowl, and he's just missed him.'

'Then it'll ha' been that bloomin' parrot that's been a talking aloft,' said a deep voice from near the pumps; but I noticed an uneasy shifting amongst some of the figures

standing there, as though *that* were a conjecture not to be too hastily received.

'Here, John,' shouted Mr Cocker; 'come up here, Johnny.'

The Chinaman, who continued to mutter 'Oh—ai—O!' whilst he gazed idiotically about him with much wringing of his hands, slowly and in attitudes of extreme misery, ascended the poop ladder.

'Could this parrot talk, John?' said Mr. Cocker.

'Oh, him talkee lubberly. Him speakee like soul of Christian gen'man.'

'What could he say?' shouted the second mate, evidently desirous that this conversation should be heard on the quarter-deck.

'Oh, him say "you go dam,"' cried John.

'And what else?' cried Mr. Cocker, smothering his laughter.

'Oh, him say "Gib me egg for breakfiss;" and him laugh "haw-haw;" and him say "hook it" and "whach you wantee;" and he speakee better than common sailor-man;' and here he burst out into another long wailing 'Oh—ai—O! Him gone for drownded. Him gone for lost, I say!'

'Now you hear what this man says, my

lads,' called Mr. Cocker. 'Jump aloft, those of you who are not *afraid*, and catch the bird if you can.'

The young fourth mate set the example; and in a trice a dozen sailors were running up the fore main and mizzen, where for a long half-hour they were bawling to one another, some of them feigning to have caught the bird, whilst they *kurikity-cooed* at the top of their pipes, the Chinaman meanwhile shrieking with excitement as he ran from one mast to another. But it was all to no purpose. The bird had evidently gone overboard; probably had attempted a flight with its shorn pinions after the second of the men who had been frightened had come down in a hurry. The search was renewed next morning at daybreak; but poor Prince was gone for good.

CHAPTER VI

WE LOSE A MAN

Spite of Mr. Cocker's hints as to Captain Keeling's timidity in the matter of canvas, the old skipper evidently knew what he was about in taking in his flying kites in good time, for whilst the seamen were still scrambling in the rigging and skylarking up there in search of the parrot, the breeze freshened in a long moaning gust over the rail, with a brighter flashing of the stars to windward, and a sudden stoop of the Indiaman that sent a line of water washing along her sides in milk; and at midnight she was bowing down with nothing showing above her main topgallant-sail to a strong wind off the beam, the stars gone, and a look of hard weather in the obscurity of the horizon.

For the next four days we had plenty of wind and high seas with frequent grey rain-squalls shrouding the ship, and leaving her

with streaming decks and darkened canvas and dribbling gear. It was Channel weather again, in short, saving that there was the relish of the temperate parallels in the air, whilst the seas rolled large and wide and regular with all the difference betwixt the motion of the ship and her rollicking neck-breaking capers in the narrow waters that you'd find between the trot of a donkey and the majestical thunderous gallop of a charger.

But the wet made a miserable time of it. What was there to be seen on deck save the gleaming forms of men in oil-skins, the sweep of the dark-green surge out of the near veil of haze, the rain-shadowed curves of the canvas—the whole fitly put to music by the damp dull clattering of booms, noises of chafing up aloft, and the wild whistling of the wind upon the taut weather rigging? The males amongst us who smoked would come together after meals in a huddle under the break of the poop, cowering against the weather bulkhead out of the wet of the rain; and on these occasions arguments ran high. If Colonel Bannister was of our company, nothing could be said but that he whipped out with a flat contradiction to it. In fact, he

was of that order of mind who reckons its mission to be that of teaching everybody to think correctly.

Once he endeavoured to prove to Mr. Emmett that he was wanting in an essential qualification of a painter, namely, an eye for atmosphere, by requesting him to say how far the horizon was off, and roaring in triumph because Mr. Emmett answered five miles. Mr. Johnson, after a careful look at the sea, submitted that Mr. Emmett was right. The colonel, pulling out his white whiskers, asked how it was possible that a journalist should know anything about such things. Angry words were averted by Mynheer Hemskirk, who, with a fat face and foolish smile, broke in with a mouldy old puzzle: 'Answer me dis: here iss a bortrait. I shtands opposite, und I shay, "Brooders und shisters hov I none boot dot man's farder iss my farder's soon! Vot relation iss dot man to dot bicture?"' The colonel had never heard this, and asked the Dutchman to repeat it. Mr. Hodder in a mild voice said: 'It is himself.' Little Mr. Saunders, after thinking hard, said it was his father. '*That's* it, of course!' shouted the colonel. The Dutchman said no,

and repeated the lines with great emphasis, striking one fist into the palm of the other at every syllable. Then sides were taken merely to enrage the colonel. Some agreed with him, and some with the Dutchman. Mr. Emmett, feigning not to catch the point, compelled the stupid good-natured Hemskirk to repeat the question a dozen times over. So loud was the argument, so angry the colonel, so excited the Dutchman, and so demonstrative most of the others of the listeners, that the chief officer came off the poop to look at us.

I give this as an instance of our method of killing that dreary time. The old ladies for the most part kept their cabins; but the girls came into the cuddy as usual, and made the interior comfortable to the eye as they sat here and there with knitting-needles in their hands or a book upon their knees.

On one of these foul-weather afternoons, hearing a strange noise of singing, I entered the cuddy, and found Peter Hemskirk standing with his face to the company and his back upon one of the Miss Joliffes, who was accompanying him at the piano. He was singing a fashionable sentimental song of that day, 'I'd be a Butterfly, born in a Bower.' The posture

of the man was exquisitely absurd as he stood with his immensely fat figure swaying to the movements of the ship, a ridiculous smile upon his face, whilst he held his arms extended, singing first to one and then to another, so that every one might share in the song. The picture of this great corpulent man, with an overflow of chins between his shirt collars, and a vast surface of green waistcoat arching out like the round of a full topsail, and then curving in again to a pair of legs of the exact resemblance of a pegtop—standing as he was with his feet close together—I say, the sight of this immense man singing 'I'd be a Booterfly' in falsetto, proved too much for the company. They listened a little with sober faces; but at last Miss Hudson gave way, and bent her head behind her mother and lay shaking in an hysterical fit of laughter; then another girl laughed out; then followed a general chorus of merriment. But the undaunted Dutchman persevered. He would not let us off a single syllable, but worked his way without the least alteration of posture right through the song, making us a low bow when he had come to an end; whilst Miss Joliffe, darting from the piano stool, fled

through the saloon and disappeared down the hatchway with a face as red as a powder-flag.

Miss Temple was the only one of us unmoved by this ridiculous exhibition. She kept her eyes bent on a book in her lap for the most part whilst Mynheer sang, now and then glancing round her with a face of cold wonder. Once our eyes met, when she instantly sent her gaze flashing to her book again. Indeed, it was already possible to see the sort of opinion in which she was held by her fellow-passengers by their manner of holding off from her as from a person who considered herself much too good to be of them, though the obligation of going to India forced her to be with them. Yet one easily guessed that the other girls hugely admired her. I'd notice them running their eyes over her dress, watching her face and bearing at table, following her motions about the deck; and again and again I would overhear them speaking in careful whispers about her when she was out of sight. In short, she might have been a woman of distinguished title amongst us; and if the passengers gave her a respectful berth, it was certainly not, I think, because they would not have felt themselves

flattered by an unbending or friendly behaviour in her.

On the following Thursday the wind slackened, the weather cleared, and midway of the forenoon it was already a hot sparkling morning, with a high heaven of delicate clouds like a silver frosting of the blue vault, a wide sea of flowing sapphire, and the Indiaman swaying along under studdingsails to the royal yards. I had been spending an hour in my bunk reading. As I passed through the cuddy on my way to the poop I heard the report of firearms, and on going on deck found Mr. Colledge and Miss Temple shooting with pistols at a bottle that dangled from the lee main-yardarm. Most of the passengers sat about watching them; but the couple were alone in the pastime. The pistols were very elegant weapons, mounted in silver, with long gleaming barrels. Colledge loaded and handed them to his companion, occasionally taking aim himself.

She could not have lighted upon any practice fitter to exhibit and accentuate the perfections of her figure and face. Her dark glance went sparkling along the line of the levelled barrel; her lips, of a delicate red,

lay lightly apart to the sweep of the breeze, that was sweet and warm as new milk; her colourless face under the broad shadow of her hat resembled some faultless carving in marble magically informed by a sort of dumb haughty human vitality. I cannot tell you how she was attired; but her figure was there in its lovely proportions, a full yet maidenly delicate shape against the clear azure over the sea-line, as she stood poised on small firm feet upon the leaning and yielding deck, her head thrown back, her arm extended, and a fire in her deep liquid eyes that anticipated the flash of the pistol.

'A very noble-looking woman, sir,' said a voice low down at my side.

Mr. Richard Saunders stood gazing up at me with the eager wistful expression that is somewhat common in dwarfs. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask the poor little chap if he had ever been in love; but he was a man whose sensitiveness and tenderness of heart obliged one to think twice before speaking.

'Ay, Mr. Saunders. A noble woman indeed, as you say,' I answered as softly as he had spoken. 'But how pale is her cheek! It makes you think of the white death that

Helena speaks of in "All's Well that Ends Well."'

'What Hemmeridge would term chlorosis,' said he. 'No, sir; she is perfectly healthy. It is a very uncommon complexion indeed, and very fit for a throne or some high place from which a woman needs to gaze imperiously and with a countenance that must not change colour.'

'She looks to have been born to something higher than she is likely to attain,' said I, watching her with eyes I found it impossible to withdraw. 'A pity there did not go a little more womanhood to her composition. She might make a fine actress, and do very well in the unrealities of life; but I should say there is but small heart there, Mr. Saunders, with just the same amount of pride that sent Lucifer flaming headlong to——'

Some one coughed immediately behind me. I looked round and met Mrs. Radcliffe's gaze full. She was seated on a hencoop; but whether she was there when I came to a stand to view Miss Temple, or had arrived unobserved by me, I could not tell. I felt the blood rise in scarlet to my brow, and walked right away forward on the forecastle, greatly,

I doubt not, to the astonishment of little Saunders, who, I believe, was in the act of addressing me when I bolted.

I went into the head of the ship and leaned against the slope of the giant bowsprit as it came in the towering steeve of those days, to the topgallant-forecastle deck, through which it vanished like the lopped trunk of a titan oak whose roots go deep. The ping of a pistol report caught my ear. There was a sound of the splintering of glass at the yard-arm, along with some hand-clapping on the poop, as though the passengers regarded this shooting at a mark as an entertainment designed for their amusement. Far out ahead of me, jockeying the jib-boom, sat a sailor at work on the stay there; his figure stooped and soared with the lift of the long spar that pointed like the ship's outstretched finger to the shining azure distance into which she was sailing, and he sang a song to himself in hoarse low notes, that to my mind put a better music to the flowing satin-like heavings of the darkly blue water under him than any mortal musician that I can think of could have married the picture to. There were a few seamen occupied on various jobs about

the forecastle. The square of the hatch called the scuttle, lay dark in the deck, and rising up through it, I could hear the grumbling notes of a sailor apparently reading aloud to one of his mates.

Presently the bewhiskered face of the boatswain showed at the head of the forecastle ladder. On spying me, he approached with the rough sea-salute of a drag at a lock of hair under his round hat. He had served as able seaman aboard the ship that I had been midshipman in, though before my time; this had come out in a chat, and now he had always a friendly greeting when I met him on deck. He was a sailor of a school that is almost extinct; a round-backed man of the merchantman's slowness in his movements, yet probably as fine a sample of a boatswain as was ever afloat; with an eye that seemed to compass the whole ship in a breath, of a singular capacity of seeing into a man and knowing what he was fit for, most exquisitely and intimately acquainted with the machinery of a vessel; a delightful performer upon his silver pipe, out of which he coaxed such clear and penetrating strains that you would have imagined when he blew

upon it a flight of canary birds had settled in the rigging round about him. The voice of the tempest was in his gruff cry of 'All hands!' and his face might have stood as a symbol for hard ocean weather, as the bursting cheeks of Boreas express the north wind. He carried a little length of tough but pliant cane in his hand, with which he would flog whatever stood next him when excited and finding fault with some fellow for 'sogering,' as it is called; and I once saw him catch a man of his own size by the scruff of the neck, and with his cane dust the hinder part of him as prettily as ever a schoolmaster laid it on to a boy.

'At the wrong end of the ship, ain't you, sir?' he called to me as he approached in his strong hearty voice.

'It's all one to me,' said I, laughing, 'now that there's no music in the like of that pipe of yours to set me dancing.'

'Ha!' he exclaimed, fetching a deep breath. 'I wonder if ever it'll be my luck to knock off the sea and settle down ashore? I allow there's more going to the life of a human being than the turning in of dead-eyes and the staying of masts *plumb*. By

the way,' added he, lowering his voice, 'I'm afeerd there's going to be a death aboard.'

'I hope not,' said I; 'it will be the first, and a little early, too. Who's the sick man, bo'sun?'

'Why, a chap named Crabb,' he answered. 'I think you know him. I once took notice of a smile on your countenance as you stood watching him at the pumps.'

'What! do you mean that bow-legged carroty creature with no top to his nose and one eye trying to look astern?'

'Ay,' said he; 'that's Crabb.'

'Dying, d'ye say, Mr. Smallridge?' I considered an instant, and exclaimed: 'Surely he was at the wheel from ten to twelve during the first watch last night?'

'So he was,' answered the boatswain; 'but he took ill in the middle watch, and the latest noose is that he's a-dying rapidly.'

'What's the poor fellow's malady?' said I.

'Well, the doctor don't seem rightly to understand,' he answered: 'he's been forrards twice since breakfast-time, and calls it a general break-up—an easy tarm for the 'splaining of a difficulty. But what it means, blowed if I know,' he added, with a glance

aft, to observe if the mate had hove into sight.

'A general break-up,' said I, 'signifies a decay of the vital organs. I don't mean to say that Crabb isn't decayed, but I certainly should have thought the worst of his distemper lay outside.'

'Oh, yes,' said he; 'you wouldn't suppose that he'd need a worse illness than his own face to kill him. But this ain't seeing after the ship's work, is it?' and with another pleasant sea-flourish of his hand to his brow, he left me.

A little later, I was walking leisurely aft, meaning to regain the poop for a yarn with Colledge, who stood alone to leeward, looking over the rail with his arms folded in the attitude of a man profoundly bored, when the ship's doctor, Mr. Hemmeridge, came out of the cuddy door to take a few pulls at his pipe under the shelter of the overhanging deck.

'So, doctor,' said I, planting myself carelessly in front of him with a light swing on my straddled legs to the soft heave of the ship, 'we are to lose a man, I hear?'

'Who told you that?' he exclaimed,

gazing at me out of a pair of moist weak eyes, which, I am afraid, told a story of something even stronger than his jalap and Glauber salts, stored secretly amongst the bottles which filled the shelves of his dark and dismal little berth right away aft over the lazarette.

'Why, the air is full of the news,' said I: 'a ship's a village, where whatever happens is known to all the neighbours.'

'I don't know about losing a man,' said he, striking a spark into a tinder-box and lighting his pipe with a sulphur match; 'he's not dead yet, anyway. We must keep our voices hushed in these matters aboard ship, Mr. Dugdale. Wherever there are ladies, there's a deal of nervousness.'

'True; and I'll be as hushed as you please. But this Crabb is so amazing a figure, that I can't but feel interested in his illness. What ails him, now?'

'If he dies, it must be of decay,' he answered, with a toss of his hand. 'I can find nothing wrong with him but the manner of his going. He lies motionless, and groans occasionally. It will be a matter in which the heart is involved, no doubt.'

I saw my curiosity did not please him, and so, after exchanging a few idle sentences, I mounted the poop and joined Mr. Colledge.

He was looking at the water that was passing, but not greatly heeding the sight of it, I daresay, though there was much, nevertheless, to engage the eye of a lover of sea-bits in the delicate interlacery of foam that came past in spaces like veils of lace spreading out on the heave of the sea along with cloudy seethings of milk-white softness under the surface, which made a wonder of the radiant opalescent blue of the clear profound there that was softened out of its sunny brilliance by the shadowing of the high side of the Indiaman.

'This is going to be a long voyage, I am afraid,' exclaimed Colledge, with a sort of sigh, bringing his back round upon the rail and leaning against it with folded arms.

'Not bored already, I hope?' said I.

'Well, do you know, Dugdale,' he exclaimed, whilst I caught his eye following the form of Miss Hudson, who was walking the weather-deck with Mr. Emmett, 'I believe I made a mistake in engaging myself before I started. When a man asks a girl to be his

wife, he ought to marry her with as little delay as possible. Now, here am I leaving the sweetheart I have affianced myself to for perhaps ten months of ocean voyaging, with some months on top of it in India for shooting, and the chance beyond of being eaten up by the game I pursue.'

'Why did you engage yourself?' said I.

'I had been lunching at her father's house —Sir John Crawley, member for Oxborough, a red-hot Tory, and one of the noblest hands at billiards you could dream of. Do you know him?'

'Never heard of him,' said I.

'Well, he rarely speaks in the House, certainly. I had been lunching with him and Fanny; and as I was not likely to see the old chap again this side of my Indian trip, he plied me with champagne in a loving way; and when I walked with Fanny into the garden for a little ramble, I was rather more emotional than is customary with me; and the long and short of it is I proposed to her, and she accepted me. Here she is,' said he; and he put his hand in his pocket and produced a very delicate little ivory miniature of a merry, pretty, rather Irish face, with soft

brown curls about the forehead, and a roguish look in the slightly lifted regard of the eyes, as though she were shooting a glance at you through her upper lashes.

'A very sweet creature,' said I, giving him back the painting. 'Is not she good enough for you? Bless my soul, what coxcombs men are! What is there to fret you in knowing that you have won the love of such a sweetheart as that?'

He hung his handsome face over the miniature, gazing at it with an intentness that brought his eyes to a squint, then slipped it into his pocket, exclaiming with an odd note of contrition in his voice: 'Well, I'm a doocid ass, I suppose. But still I think I made a mistake in engaging myself. There was time enough to ask her to marry me when I returned. Who knows that I shall ever return?'

'Now, *don't* be sentimental, my dear fellow.'

'Oh yes, that's all very fine,' said he; 'but I suppose you know that tiger-hunting isn't altogether like chasing a hare, for instance.'

'Don't tiger-hunt, then,' said I, growing

sick of all this. 'Hark! what fine voice is that singing in the cuddy?'

He pricked his ear. 'Oh, it is Miss Temple,' said he; and he stole away to the after skylight, through which a glimpse of the piano was to be had. He took a peep, then bestowed a train of nods upon me, and a moment after crept below. Alas! for Fanny Crawley, thought I.

Both of the wide skylights were open, and Miss Temple's voice rose clear and full, a rich contralto, with now and then a tremor sounding through it in an added quality of sweetness. Those who were walking paused to listen, and those who were seated let fall their work or lifted their eyes from their books. Mr. Johnson and one or two others assembled at the skylight. But no one saving friend Colledge offered to go below. I could have bet a thousand pounds that the cuddy was empty, or the girl never would have sung. In fact, one took notice of a sort of timidity in the very hearkening of the people to her, as though she were a princess whose voice was something to be listened to afar and with respect, and who was not to be approached or disturbed on any account whatever. Soon after she had

ended, a male voice piped up, and Mr. Johnson, after listening a little, came sauntering over to me.

'Your friend Colledge don't sing ill,' he exclaimed with the complacent grin he usually put on before delivering himself. 'Do you feel equal to a small bet?'

'What's the wager to be about?'

'I bet you,' said he, closing one eye, 'twenty shillings to a crown that Mr. Colledge and Miss Temple will have plighted their troth before we strike the longitude of the Cape of Good Hope.'

'Why not latitude?' said I.

'Why, my dear sir, don't you see that the longitude gives me a broader margin?' And the fellow was actually beginning to explain the difference between latitude and longitude, when I cut him short.

'I'll not bet,' said I; 'I have no wish to win your money on a certainty. They won't be engaged, and so you'd better keep your sovereign.'

He whistled low, and with a mel ncholy attempt at a comical cast of countenance, exclaimed: 'Ah, I see how it goes. It is the wish, my friend, that's father to the thought.

But Lor' preserve us; my dear Mr. Dugdale, do you suppose that a young lady after her pattern would ever condescend to cast her eye upon anything even the sixtieth part of one single degree beneath the level of the son of a baron and heir to the title and property?'

'Do you recollect,' said I, 'how your name-sake Dr. Samuel Johnson told his friends that being teased by a neighbour at table to give his opinion on Horace or Virgil, I forget which, he immediately fixed his attention on thoughts of Punch and Judy? Suffer me now to imitate that great man and to think of Punch and Judy.'

'Here comes Punch, I do believe,' said he with a good-natured laugh.

As he spoke, up rose the figure of Colonel Bannister from the quarter-deck. His face was red with temper, his eyes sparkled, and his white whiskers stood out like spikes of light from a flame. We happened to be the first persons he came across as he climbed the ladder.

'Of all infernal instruments,' he cried, 'the piano is the worst. What on earth, I should like to know, do shipowners mean by adding that execrable piece of furniture to the cabin

accommodation? The moment I sit down to write up my diary, twang-twang goes that scoundrel Jew's harp; and as if that noise were not enough, a woman must needs fall a-squealing to it; and then, when I think that the row is over for a bit, and I pick up my pen afresh, some chap with a voice like a tormented hog lets fly.'

'You should write to the *Times*, sir,' said Mr. Johnson.

The colonel gave him a look full of marlinespikes and corkscrews, and walked aft on his short stiff legs to the captain, with whom I heard him expostulating in very strong language. Presently the tiffin-bell rang, and I went below.

CHAPTER VII

A SEA FUNERAL

THE doctor sat on the starboard side of the table, and I caught him eyeing me with a meaning expression that somewhat puzzled me. Once, indeed, he winked, and fearing that he might be a little tipsy and easily led into a demonstrativeness of manner sufficiently marked to catch the skipper's attention, I took some pains not to see him. Old Keeling, at the head of the table, his face shining like a mahogany figure-head under a fresh coat of varnish, was in the middle of the story of his action with the corsair in the Bay of Bengal, when Mr. Prance entered the cuddy and quietly took his seat. He fell to work upon a piece of corned beef whilst he seemed to listen with a face of respectful courtesy to Keeling's long-winded yarn, with its running commentary of 'How brave!' 'What dreadful

creatures!' 'How very awful!' and the like from the ladies.

The skipper came to an end, and Mr. Prance said to me: 'A plucky fight, sir.'

'Very,' said I, watching for that twinkle of eye which his voice suggested.

'The best of an engagement of that sort,' he exclaimed, 'is that you may go on fighting it over and over again without loss of blood. By the way, talking of pirates, the captain has yet to be informed that one of them lies dead aboard his ship.'

I stared at him.

'A fellow named Crabb,' he began.

'What!' I interrupted; 'is Crabb dead then?'

It was now his turn to stare. 'Do you know the man, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Why, yes,' I answered, 'as the ugliest creature (heaven rest his soul, since he *is* dead!) that ever encountered mortal gaze.'

'But how did you learn that his name was Crabb, and that he was dying? for *that* you seem to have guessed also, judging from your question?'

'Why, my dear sir,' I answered, 'you have a large company of sailors on board, and the

ship is full of deep-sea voices, and I carry ears in my head, Mr. Prance.'

'Humph!' said he. 'Well, as I've always said, news travels a deal too fast aboard passenger craft. In fact, I've known passengers to pick up things which had remained for weeks afterwards secrets to the captain and mates.' He emptied a glass of marsala and added: 'You are right in speaking of the man's ugliness. I have been to see him as he lies in his bunk.' He made a dreadful grimace and upturned his eyes to the deck above.

'Was this Crabb a pirate?' said I.

'Ay,' he answered; 'but I had not heard of it down to half an hour ago. The carpenter knew him, but held his tongue when he found him a shipmate. Now that the fellow is dead, Chips has a yarn as long as the sea-snake about him. He did business in West Indian waters; and the carpenter says that if the stories he told against himself were to be believed, no viler miscreant ever stepped between the rails of a ship.'

'But did he brag of his evil doings in the forecastle before the men?' I asked.

'No; Chips had been shipmate with him two voyages ago in a small craft, and he after-

wards met him ashore in several of the low sailors' haunts down in the east end of London. When he had too much drink, he would out with the most blood-curdling tales of atrocity. No, sir; he kept his counsel aboard this ship. He knew what would have followed had his career been suspected by us aft.'

'When do you bury him?' said I.

'To-morrow morning, I suppose,' he answered. 'Captain Keeling is averse to hasty funerals. I've heard him say that when he was chief mate, a man died, and two hours later the body had been stitched up ready for the last toss; but whilst the captain was looking for his Prayer-book, the boatswain of the ship came rushing aft with his hair on end and his eyes half out of his head to report that the hammock with its contents had rolled off the grating on which it was placed, and was wriggling about the deck. When it was cut open, the fellow inside was found to be alive, bathed in perspiration and half-mad with fright.'

This conversation we had carried on in a low voice, easily managed, as I sat on his right hand close against him. A few minutes later the mate went on to the poop, and I stepped

to the quarter-deck to smoke a cheroot. Whilst I was preparing the weed to light it, Dr. Hemmeridge came out of the cuddy.

'You may be interested to know,' said he, 'that your ugly friend is dead.'

'And that is what you wished to convey to me by winking?' said I.

He nodded with a smile that could scarcely be called sober. 'You took a particular interest in him,' he exclaimed, 'and so I thought I would give you the news before I made my report to the captain.'

'You are very good,' I exclaimed with a sarcastic bow.

'In fact, Mr. Dugdale,' he continued, 'I am going to pay another visit to the forecastle, as there is something in the manner of this fellow's death that puzzles me. Indeed, it is as likely as not I may make a post-mortem examination.' Here he lifted his hand and eyed it an instant. I noticed that it trembled. He immediately grew conscious of his action, blushed slightly, and spoke with a note of confusion: 'The devil of it is, the Jacks object to this sort of inquisitions. Then, again, the light forward is abominably bad, and there is too much risk when there are ladies aboard in any attempt

to smuggle the body aft. Would you like to see the man? You admired him in life, you know.'

I hung in the wind a moment, then said: 'Yes; I will go with you;' and we trudged forwards.

The sailors' dwelling-place was what is called a topgallant forecastle; a structure in the bows of the ship corresponding with the cuddy and its poop-deck aft. There was a wing on either hand of it that came very nearly to abreast of the foremast, for in those times a ship's foremast was stepped or erected nearer to the bows than it now stands. Each of these two wings held a couple of cabins, respectively occupied by the boatswain, the sail-maker, the carpenter, and the cook. You entered the forecastle itself by doors just forward of the huge windlass, the great fore-hatch lying between it and the long-boat that stood in chocks full of live-stock. It should have been familiar ground to me; yet I found something of real novelty, too, in the sight as I followed the doctor through the port door and entered what resembled a vast gloomy cave, resonant with the sound of seas smitten by the cutwater, with a slush-lamp swinging amidships

under a begrimed beam, and a line of daylight falling a little beyond fair through the open scuttle or deck-hatch, and resembling in its dusty shaft and defined margin a sunbeam striking through a chink of the shutter of a darkened room.

There was at least a score of hammocks hung up under the ceiling or upper deck, with here and there the faces of mariners showing over them, or perhaps the half of a stockinged leg, and nothing else of the man inside but *that* to be seen. There was also a double tier of bunks, which wound round from the after bulkhead into the gloom forward, that seemed the darker, somehow, for the loom of the immense heel of the bowsprit that came piercing through the knightheads. It was a rough, wild scene to survey by that light; a blending into a sort of muddle, as it were, of hammocks and sea-chests and stanchions and dangling oil-skins and sea-boots and canvas bags, and divers other odds and ends of the marine equipment. There were figures seated on the boxes, stolidly smoking, or stitching at their clothes; grim, silent, unshaven salts, stealing out upon the eye in that strange commingling of dull light

and dim shadow, in proportions so grotesque and even startling that they hardly needed to vanish on a sudden to persuade one they were creatures of another universe. Many creaking and straining noises threaded the hush in this gloomy timber cavern. The motion of the ship, too, was much more defined here than it was aft, and you felt the deck rising and falling under your feet as though you were on a see-saw with a frequent small thunder of cleft sea breaking in.

The doctor made his way to a bunk on the port side, almost abreast of the scuttle, where the light came sifting through the gloom with power enough to define shape, and even colour. In this bunk lay a motionless figure under a blanket, and a small square of canvas over his head. The bunks in the immediate neighbourhood were empty, and the fellows who swung in hammocks a little distance away peered dumbly at us, with eyes which gleamed like discs of polished steel amid the hair on their faces.

Dr. Hemmeridge pulled the bit of sailcloth from the face of the body, and there lay before me the most hideous mask that could enter the mind of any man, saving

the master who drew Caliban, to figure. Nothing showed of the eyes through the contracted lids but the whites. There was a drop in the under-jaw that had twisted the creature's hare-lip into the distortion of a shocking grin.

I took one look and recoiled, and, as I did so, a fellow who had been watching us at the forecastle door approached and said respectfully: 'There ain't no doubt of his being stone-dead, sir, I suppose?'

Hemmeridge turned from the body. There was an odd look of loathing and puzzlement in his face.

'Oh yes, man, quite dead,' he answered. 'An amazing corpse, don't you think, Mr. Dugdale? Good enough to preserve in spirits as a show for the museum of a hospital.'

'I hope,' exclaimed a deep voice from a hammock that swung near, 'if so be that that there Crabb's dead and gone, he ain't going to be let lie to p'ison the parfumed hatmosphere of this here drawing-room.'

'No, my man,' answered the doctor, looking at the body; 'we'll have him out of this in good time. But there's nothing to hurt in his remaining here a bit.'

'What did he doy of?' asked an old sailor, who had risen from his chest, and stood surveying us as he leaned against a stanchion with the inverted bowl of a sooty pipe betwixt his teeth.

'Now, what would be the good,' cried the doctor fretfully, 'of giving this forecastle a lecture on the causes of death? What did he die of? A plague on't, Mr. Dugdale! Do you know I've a great mind to take a peep inside him, if only in the interests of the medical journals.'

'I'm beginning to feel a little faint,' said I, with a movement towards the forecastle door.

'Oh well, Mr. Willard,' exclaimed Hemmeridge, addressing the man who had approached us, and who proved to be the sailmaker, 'have him stitched up as soon as you please, and then get him on to the fore-hatch with a tarpaulin over him, till other orders come forward.'

'Are ye likely to hold an inquest, doctor?' asked the sailmaker, whose Roman nose and thin frill or streamlet of wool-white whisker running under his chin from one ear to another gave him a queer sort of yearning

raised haggard look in that light, as he inclined his head forward to ask the question.

'Oh, it wouldn't be an inquest,' responded the doctor with a short laugh. 'But it is death from natural causes, anyway,' added he in a careless voice; 'and so we'll go aft again, Mr. Dugdale; unless, indeed, you would like to take another view of your friend?'

I shoved past him, and got out of the forecastle at once; and never before did the sunshine seem more glorious, nor the ocean breeze sweeter, nor the swelling heights of the Indiaman more airily beautiful and majestic. In fact, I had felt half suffocated in that forecastle; and as I made my way to the poop, I respired the gushing wind as it hummed past me over the bulwarks as thirstily as ever shipwrecked sailor lapped water.

That same evening, some time after dinner, after a long smoke and a yarn with Colledge and young Fairthorne down on the quarter-deck, where we patrolled the planks in a regular look-out swing from the cuddy front to the gangway and back again, I went on to the poop, leaving my two companions to continue a game of chess in the cuddy,

where they had been playing that afternoon. It was a fine clear moonless night, with a pleasant breeze out of the north-east, before which the ship was quietly running under all plain sail, saving the fore and mizzen royals, with a fore-topmast studdingsail boom still rigged out and reeling gaunt athwart the stars to the quiet heave and plunge of the ship, as though it were some giant fishing-rod in the hand of a Colossus bobbing for whales.

There were a few passengers moving about the deck, but it was too dark to make sure of them, though the delicate sheen in the air, falling in a sort of silver showering from the velvet-dark heaven of brilliants on high, enabled one to see forms and to follow the movements of things clearly. There was a deal of phosphorus in the water this night, and I stood looking over the lee quarter at the pale green or sun-coloured flashings of it as it swept into the race of our wake in fiery coils, in configurations as of writhing serpents, in fibrine interwreathings that would enlarge and shape themselves into the proportions of sea-monsters and leviathan fish.

'Is it true, do you know, that one of the

sailors died this afternoon?' exclaimed a low, clear, but most melodious voice by my side.

It was Miss Temple. She started as I quitted my leaning posture and turned to her.

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' she exclaimed in a changed note.

It was very clear she had mistaken me—for Colledge, for all I can tell. She was alone. Yet had she come from the cuddy, she must certainly have seen the young sprig playing at the table with Fairthorne at chess.

'I should be glad to answer your question,' said I coolly, 'if you care to stop and listen, Miss Temple.'

By the starlight I could see her fine imperious dark eyes bent on me.

'It is curious,' she exclaimed—and perhaps by daylight I should have found some sign of a smile in her face; but her countenance showed like marble in that shadow—'that this should be the second time I have asked you about what is happening in the ship. You have been a sailor, I think, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Mr. Colledge has doubtless told you so,' said I.

'Yes; it was he who told me. You share

his cabin, I believe. Will you tell me if it be true that one of the sailors has died?'

'It is true,' said I; 'a sailor named Crabb died this morning.'

'Has he been buried?'

'No; that ceremony is to take place in the morning, I believe.'

'Our ship, then, will sail all night long with a dead body on board?' she exclaimed with a lift of her eyes to the stars and then a look seawards. 'Are not the superstitions of sailors opposed to such burdens?'

'Jack does not love dead bodies,' said I, making as if to resume my leaning posture at the rail, as one interrupted in a reverie; for harmless as her questions were, I did not at all relish her haughty commanding manner of putting them; besides, this was the first time I had exchanged a sentence with her since that night of the collision in the Channel; and the unconquerable delight I took in gazing at her beauty, that *now*, to my ardent young eyes, was idealised by the starlit dusk by which I surveyed her into graces beyond expression fascinating, affected me also as a sort of injury to my own dignity, thanks to the mood that had grown up in me through

what I had said and thought of her. 'But,' continued I carelessly, 'what is regarded as a superstition by the sailor is a stroke of nature common to us all. One may travel far without meeting any person who will choose a dead body for company.'

She walked to the rail a few feet away from where I stood, and looked at the water for some while in silence, as though she had not heard me.

'I would rather die anywhere than at sea,' she exclaimed, as though thinking aloud, with a sudden crossing of her hands upon her breast, as if a chill had entered her from the dark ocean. 'The horror of being buried in that void there would keep me alive. Oh, if it be true, as Shakespeare says, that dreams may visit us in our graves—in our graves ashore, where there are daisies and green turf and the twinkling shadows of leaves, and often the full moon and the high summer night shedding a peace like that of God himself, passing all understanding, upon the dead—*what* should be the visions that enter into the sleep of one floating deep down in that great mystery there?'

This was a passage of humour which I

was quite young enough to have coaxed, and have sought to improve in any other fine young woman after her pattern; but my temper just then happened to be perverse and my mood obnoxious to sentiment.

'Why,' said I, pretending to stare at the water, 'what's the difference between being lowered in a coffin and being hove overboard in a canvas sack with a lump of holystone at one's feet, when one doesn't know it? If one could believe in the mermaid, in coral pavilions illuminated with cressets brilliant with sea-fire, in those sweet songs which were formerly sung by *fishy* virgins, who swept their lyres of gold with arms of ivory and fingers of pearl, I believe that when my time came I should be very willing to take the plunge, in fact *choose* it in preference to——'

I brought my eyes away from the water, and saw her figure in the companion-way down which she floated!

A minute later, Colonel Bannister came along. He approached me close, staring hard, and said: 'Oh, it's you, Dugdale! I thought it was the second-mate. Here's a pretty go! There's a man dead.'

'He couldn't help it, colonel,' said I.

'Ay, but what did he die of?' he shouted. 'I've asked Hemmeridge, and he won't give the disease a name. I don't want it to go further, but betwixt you and me and the bed-post, hang me'—here he subdued his voice into an extraordinary croaking whisper—'if I don't believe that Hemmeridge'—and he lifted his hand to his mouth in a posture of drinking. 'My contention is, they've got no right to keep the body. What's the good of it? Since Hemmeridge is mute, who's going to say that the seaman didn't die of smallpox? That's it, you see! Smallpox! and a crowd of creatures forward who are infernally negligent in cleanliness, as all sailors are, not to mention a mob of us aft who, if a plague should break out, must perish. Mind, I say *perish!* Where's that second-mate?'

He impetuously crossed the deck and hurried forward on the weather side of the poop.

'Beg pardon, sir,' said the fellow at the wheel, speaking in a deep, bass, salt voice; ''tain't for the likes of me to say nothen, leastways here;' he made a step to leeward, holding a spoke at arm's-length, to expectorate over the rail, and then returned: 'but

I've heerd the bo'sun say as that you've been a sailorman in your day, and I know that the gent that's just left 'ee is a sojer. And I should ha' taken it very koind if, when he told ye that we was an oncleanly lot forrards, you'd ha' called him a bloomin' liar.'

'So he is, my man,' said I, 'whether I tell him so or not.'

'I've been a-sailing in troopships ower and ower again,' exclaimed the fellow, half-stifling himself, to subdue his angry voice, 'and I could tell that there gent this—that spite of all his pipeclay and the ship-shape looks of him outside, there ain't an oncleanlier man than the *guffy*. You let him know that, sir; and if he dorn't believe it, and the capt'n 'll gi' me leave, smite me! if I won't ondertake to argue it out wi' him to the satisfaction of every party as chooses for to listen, either aft'—striking the wheel a blow with his immense fist; 'or forrads'—another blow; 'or down in the hold'—a third blow; 'or up in that there main-top;' and here he fetched his thigh a whack that sounded like the report of a firearm.

'Wheel there! where are you driving the ship to?' shouted the second-mate from the

forward part of the poop; but merely as an excuse, I think, to break away from the colonel, who had now tailed on to him.

As he came rumbling aft, I went forward.

It was the most delicate gentle weather imaginable next morning when I went on deck an hour before breakfast-time to get a cold bath in the ship's head, which to my mind is the very noblest luxury the sea has to yield: nothing to be done but to strip, drop over the side on to the grating betwixt the headboards, well out of sight of the poop, where the spout of the head-pump, as it is called, commands you, and so be played on for half-an-hour at a spell by some ordinary seaman, who will be glad to oblige you for the value of a glass of grog. Oh, the delight past language of the sensation sinking through and through one to the very marrow that comes with the gushing of the sparkling green brine pouring away from one in foam back into the flashing heart of the deep out of which it is sucked!

As I passed the forehatch on my way aft, I observed a heap of something lying under a arpaulin; at the same moment the boatswain stepped out of his berth.

'Have ye heard what time the funeral's to take place, sir?'

'Bless me!' cried I with a start, 'I had forgotten all about it. Small wonder that we and our troubles should be compared to sparks that fly upwards, for we are extinguished in a breath and clean forgotten.' I glanced at the tarpaulin on the hatchway with an ugly shuddering recollection coming upon me of the face of the man as I had last viewed him dead in his bunk. 'No,' said I; 'I am unable to tell you when they mean to bury him. The sooner the better, I should say.'

'True for you, sir,' he answered; 'here are some of our chaps swearing that they had bad dreams last night, all a-owing to this here dead man a-lying here. The fact is Crabb wasn't no favourite, and since he's made his hexit, as the saying is, the men want him gone for true.'

As he said this, the third-mate, Mr. Playford, came forward singing out for the boatswain.

'Here, sir,' answered Smallridge in a voice like the low of a calf.

The officer crossed the hatch, taking care

to give the heap under the tarpaulin a wide berth.

'Funeral's to take place at four bells, bo'sun,' said he.—'Good morning, Mr. Dugdale. All hands to be cleaned up and attend. Pity there's no more wind, Mr. Dugdale. The trades are consumedly slow of coming. Four bells, bo'sun, d'ye hear? All hands—the big ensign—four pall-bearers,' he added with a grin—'everything to be shipshape and in Bristol fashion—to please the ladies,' he added, looking at me with one eye shut.

'Well, now you know all about it, Mr. Smallridge,' said I, and walked aft with Mr. Playford; and the breakfast-bell then sounding, I entered the cuddy and took my place.

I had thought to catch a glance, perhaps *one* glance, during the meal from Miss Temple, who might probably recollect her few words with me on the preceding evening, and her cool trick of sliding off to let me talk aloud to myself. But she never turned her eyes my way. She sometimes spoke across the table to Mr. Colledge, once inclined her fine figure towards Captain Keeling to respond to some

remark of his, and occasionally exchanged a sentence with her aunt. But the rest of us might have been as much hidden as the body of Crabb was forward, for all the attention she honoured us with.

'I am glad that this funeral is going to take place,' Mr. Johnson said to me. 'I have promised a friend of mine who owns a newspaper in London a series of articles on this voyage, and down to this time I haven't quite seen my way. For what has happened proper to tell? Dash my wig! saving that collision, of which I couldn't make head nor tail, and dare not therefore attempt, what ghost of an incident good for what I may call word-painting has occurred?'

'This burial should give you the chance you want,' said I.

'Yes,' he exclaimed; 'I shall be able to do it justice, I believe. I am a little uncertain in the matter of nautical terms; and when I've finished the account of it, I should be glad if you'd listen to it, Mr. Dugdale, and correct any trifling technical errors I may happen to make. Even now, I'll be shot if I can tell the difference between starboard and larboard—never can remember, somehow.

The words are so confoundedly alike, you know.'

'If I were you,' said I, 'I should not suffer ignorance of the sea-life to hinder me from writing fully about it. Few sailors read; nobody else understands the calling. Say what you like, and you need only dash your absurdities into your canvas with a cocksure brush to be accepted as an authority.'

'Still,' he exclaimed, 'in an account of a funeral at sea I should like to have the rigging right; nor in a description which,' added he complacently, 'is not likely to be wanting in some of the choicer qualities of poetry, would it be desirable, insignificant as the error might be in the eyes of landsmen, to mistake the mainmast for, let me say, the spanker boom.'

I assured him that I should be glad to hear his account when he had written it; and soon afterwards we left the table and went on deck.

The ship was this morning a very grand show of canvas. Her yards were braced just a little forward; the weather clew of the mainsail was up; all studdingsails to port were on her, and aloft she had something of the look of a line-of-battle ship with her im-

mensely square yards rising to the truck, the great hoist of main top-sail, with its four bands of reef-points, enormously thick shrouds and big tops, and all the heavens over the bow and far to port hidden by space upon space of cloth, effulgent in the sunshine, and flinging a light of their own upon the blue air in a sort of liquid gushing of radiance off their edges, trembling into an exquisite delicacy of outline like a thinness of ice against the sky. At the peak flew the red ensign half-mast high, languidly floating in rich brand-new folds of sunny crimson to the quiet breathing of the wind over the quarter. It was a hint of what was to come, and you noticed the influence of it upon the passengers, who talked in subdued voices, and walked thoughtfully, as though it were the Sabbath and Divine service was shortly to be held. There was nothing in sight the wide and gleaming circle round, saving the shoulders of a group of huge cream-coloured clouds down in the west, looking like the mountainous loom of a snow-whitened country.

Shortly before ten o'clock, Smallridge, taking his stand upon the forecastle head, applied his silver whistle to his lips, and sent

the shrill metallic summons ringing throughout the length of the ship, following it with a deep-chested hurricane roar of 'All hands 'tend funeral.' The Jacks had been off work since breakfast time, and to the boatswain's melodious invitation they came tumbling out of the forecastle all in the spruce warm-weather attire of those days—flowing white trousers, coloured shirts, round jackets, collars lying open to half way down their breasts, half a fathom of silk handkerchief worked up into the sailor's knot, and, for the most part, round hats of straw, shaped like a tall hat of to-day, but the crown considerably lower. They came soberly rolling along in bunches of three and four, and massed themselves forward of the gangway and round about the hatchway, and the huge pillar of mast shooting up abaft it. In the foreground stood Smallridge, with three rows of cloth buttons to his jacket, his storm-beaten face luminous with recent rinsing, and his cheeks framed by a pair of upright collars such as the negro minstrel of our time loves to embellish his blackened countenance with. Next him was the sailmaker, his small blood-stained eyes restlessly rolling themselves aft upon the people on the

poop from either side his high Roman nose. By his side was the cook, a fat, bilious-looking man; and close to him the carpenter, a withered old Scotchman, with a face of leather, puckered into a thousand wrinkles by time, weather, and trials of temper.

The first, third, and fourth mates took their place a little abaft the gangway, leaving the second officer on the poop to look after the ship. A young reefer clad in bright buttons stood at the bell, which he struck in funereal time, constantly glancing around him to find some one to exchange a grin with. When all were assembled the skipper stalked solemnly out of the cuddy, Prayer-book in hand. He was dressed as the officers were, in a long blue coat with black velvet lapels, cuffs, and collar, and white jean pantaloons. The only feature that distinguished his costume from that of the mates was the undecorated coat-cuffs; whereas the chief-mate had one button on his wrist, the third-mate three, and the fourth-mate four. Keeling was a man of strong piety, and his manner of addressing himself to this solemn business was full of an old-fashioned awe and reverence, which one might look a long way round among modern

sea captains to find the like of, in such a performance, at all events, as that of burying the remains of a forecastle hand. Most of the passengers were grouped along the break of the poop to witness the ceremony. I see that large and stirring picture very freshly even now: the mass of whiskered faces, one showing past another, nearly every jaw moving to the gnawing of a quid; Keeling and his officers in full fig; the many-coloured dresses of the ladies fluttering along the line of the poop rail; I recall the deep hush that settled down upon the fine ship, no sound to break it but the tolling of the bell and a noise of water lazily washing alongside. High above us the great squares of canvas rose in brilliant clouds, one swelling to another with a soft swaying of the whole majestic fabric, as though the vessel were something sentient, and was keeping time with her mastheads to the mournful chimes on the quarter-deck.

The bell ceased; the midshipman struck ten o'clock upon it; the Jacks on the quarter-deck made a lane, and down it from forward came four hearty seamen, bearing upon their shoulders a hatch grating, on which was the hammock containing the body, covered with

England's commercial ensign. One end of this grating was rested upon the lee rail; then the captain began to read the sea funeral service. Mr. Johnson, who stood near me, stared thirstily at the scene; and methought Mr. Emmett, who was perched on the rail to windward, rolled his eye over the mass of colour that softened and brightened as the movement of the ship shifted the shadows, as though some fancies of a startling canvas to be wrought out of the spectacle were stirring in his mind. The captain paused in his delivery; the ensign was whipped off, the grating tilted, and the white hammock flashed overboard. I was at the lee rail, and glanced down into the sea alongside as the hammock sped from the bulwark. But the ocean coffin, instead of sinking, went floating astern like a lifebuoy, bobbing bravely upon the summer tumble, and lifting and sinking upon the swell as duck-like as a waterborne lifeboat.

I believe no man saw this but myself, everybody listening reverentially to the closing words of the skipper's recital from the Prayer-book. I walked hastily aft to observe the hammock as it veered into our wake, and

beckoned to Mr. Cocker, who at once crossed the deck.

'See there!' cried I, pointing to the thing that was frisking in the eddies upturned by our keel, and crawling into the distance to the slow progress of the ship. 'Friend Crabb seems in no hurry to knock at Davy Jones's door.'

'I expect the fool of a sailmaker forgot to weight the body,' said he. 'Unless,' he added, with a little change in his voice, as if he meant what he said, whilst he did not wish me to suppose him in earnest, 'the chap was too great a rascal when alive to sink now that he's nothing but a body.'

'I thought,' I exclaimed, 'that wicked sailors, like Falstaff, had an alacrity in sinking.'

'I'll tell you a fact, then, Mr. Dugdale,' said he. 'I was aboard a ship where we buried a man that had murdered a negro in Jamaica. He was a ruffian down to the heels of his yellow feet, sir, with a deal worse on his conscience, in our opinion, than even the blood of a darkey. It was a dead calm when we dropped him over the side with a twelve-pound shot at the clews of his hammock.

Down he went; but up he came again, and lay wobbling under the main chains. The captain, not liking such a neighbour, ordered a boat over with a fresh weight for the corpse. It was another twelve-pound shot, and down it took him, as all hands expected. But scarce was the boat hoisted when the chief mate, who was looking over the rail, sings out quietly: "Here's Joey again." And *there* lay the hammock just under the mizzen chains. 'Twas lucky a breath of wind came along just then and sneaked the barque away, for had the calm lasted, the men would have sworn that the body had got hold of the ship and wouldn't let her move. But as to our being ever able to sink it'—he shook his head, and pointing to the hammock that was now showing like a fleck of foam in the tail of our wake, he exclaimed: 'It's the same with Crabb. He's of the sort that Old Davy will have nothing to do with.'

The boatswain's pipe shrilled out again; the ceremony was over. The sailors stalked gravely towards the forecastle, the passengers distributed themselves about the poop.

'Quite worth seeing, don't you think?' said Mr. Johnson, coming up to me in the

manner of a man fresh from a stage performance that has pleased him. 'Only let me be sure of my nautical details, and I believe I can see my way to a very pretty article, Mr. Dugdale.'

CHAPTER VIII

A STRANGE CARGO

We took the north-east trades on the Canary parallels; but they blew a very light breeze, occasionally failing us, indeed, with more than once a positive hint of a shift in the western sky, though no change happened. Captain Keeling declared that in all his time he never remembered the like of so faint a trade-wind. Indeed, it threatened us with a long passage to the equator, and again and again I would feel as vexed as if I had had command of the ship, and my reputation depended upon her progress, when I'd come on deck and find the long blue heave of the swell gushing to our port quarter, just freckled by the delicate soft wind, with scarce a ripple of weight enough to run into foam, the weather clew of the mainsail swinging in and out, and the big top-sails, to the curtseying of the ship upon the swell, coming into the masts with short slaps,

which made each sheet hum like a twanged harp-wire through its yard-arm sheave-hole. Very different was all this from my own experience of the trades when, for days and days, from twenty-seven degrees north down to within thirty leagues of the equator, it had been one long wild thunderous spell of sailing, foam to the hawse-pipes, every yard and studding-sail boom straining at its brace as a racer at its bridle, the white water to leeward flashing past in a dazzle, like foam from the sponsons of a paddle-steamer, and all day long a fine noise of wind roaring between the masts, and on high the wool-like clouds of the trades blowing, charged with prismatic hues, transversely across the line of our course.

Yet we managed to kill the time with some degree of entertainment to ourselves. Mr. Greenhew and Mr. Riley were head over ears in love with Miss Hudson, and were beginning to talk sarcasm at each other when there were people near to listen to their conversation. Mr. Fairthorne was paying very marked attention to Miss Mary Joliffe. Mynheer Peter Hemskirk seemed to find something agreeable in the company of Miss Helen Trevor, an exceedingly fat, blue-eyed girl, with a bunch

of flaxen ringlets falling before each ear, and her hair behind dragged up to a tall comb that sat in an odd staring way upon her head. There was some sport in all this for quiet observation. Then there was always a rubber of whist to be had. Though Colonel Bannister was often in too peppery a humour to play, his aristocratic falcon-beaked wife was ever ready and eager to take a hand, and partners were never to be wanting when Mr. Adam or Mr. Saunders or Mr. Hodder was about.

Colledge and I were good friends, and had long yarns together in our cabin and on deck. It was, maybe, because we shared a berth that I was more with him than with the others, though Mr. Johnson once attempted a stroke of irony by saying that of course my intimacy with Mr. Colledge had nothing whatever to do with the circumstance of his being the son of a lord, 'which,' added he, 'speaks well for your heart, Dugdale, for he has very many excellent qualities.'

'Mr. Johnson,' said I, 'I do not think you very brilliant as a genius, and I am sure you are not very richly stocked in gifts of satire. I would advise you to dedicate all you have in that way to your profession, lest, when you

come to set up as a book-critic, you will find yourself *gastados*, as the Spaniards say—expended.'

But to return to Mr. Colledge: the characteristic I liked him best for was a certain naïveté. He would speak of his engagement with Fanny Crawley as a schoolboy might of a like experience, and not seem to know what to make of it. One day he was lying in his bunk smoking a pipe, with his leg over the edge, his head propped by his arm, his handsome face flushed by the heat, and his soft dark-blue eyes shining as with wine. I had come warm and fatigued from the poop, and lay stretched upon the deck on my mattress. We had been talking of Miss Crawley, and he had lugged her portrait from his breast-pocket to have a look at it; which indeed was a habit of his when he spoke of her, as though he could hardly persuade himself that he was engaged without first taking a peep.

'Upon my word, Dugdale,' said he languidly, 'hang me now, if it was not for Fanny here, I'd propose to Louise Temple. She's a ripping girl, and the sort of woman my father would like; a fine stately presence for a drawing-room, eh? Figure the dignity with which

she would kiss the hand of a sovereign, making the business quite the other way about by her salutation, and queening it to the confusion of every eye. My father doesn't very much care about Fanny—has no style, he thinks—nothing distinguished about her.'

'But you are engaged to her with his sanction, I presume?'

'I don't know,' he answered.

I laughed, and said: 'Has Miss Temple heard that you're engaged to be married?'

'No,' he answered with a small air of confusion; 'there was no need to tell her. What should there be in such a confession to interest her? You're the only person on board the ship that I have mentioned the thing to. Of course I can trust to *you*,' said he, soothingly.

'Trust me!' I exclaimed, laughing again. 'There is nothing wrong surely in this engagement that you should fear the betrayal of the secret of it? But since it *is* a secret, it is perfectly safe in my keeping.'

'Do you think I ought to tell Miss Temple that I'm engaged?' said he.

'Well, if you are making love to her,' said I, 'it might be as well to give her a hint that you're not in earnest.'

'Oh, but, confound it, I *am!*' he cried. 'I mean,' he added, catching himself up, 'I think her a doocidly charming girl, and the most delightful creature to flirt with that ever I met in my life; but if I go and tell her I'm engaged'——

'Well?'

'It would knock my association with her on the head. It is not as if Fanny were within reach of an early post. Even if I were disposed to break off my engagement with her, it must take me some months to do it. D'ye understand me?'

'You mean, of course,' said I, 'that no letter can reach her under seven or eight months, unless, indeed, you conveyed one to her by a homeward-bound ship.'

'Ay; but putting the homeward-bound ship aside, Fanny could not know of my resolution—were it ever to come to *that*—until she received the letter I posted to her in India; therefore, I should have to consider myself engaged to her all that time.'

'No doubt,' said I, beginning to feel bored.

'Miss Temple would take that view,' said he, 'and that's why I don't choose to tell her the truth.'

'I don't quite follow your logic,' I exclaimed; 'but no matter. It may be that you want too much in the way of sweethearts. But so far as your secret goes, you can trust me to hold my tongue. Possibly, I may admire Miss Temple as warmly as you do; see qualities in her superior even to her excellence as a mistress of postures; but I do not yet love her so passionately as not to wish to see her chastened a bit by the lesson she is likely to learn from your delight in her society.'

'I don't understand,' he exclaimed, lazily knocking the ashes of his pipe out through the open porthole.

'Neither do I,' cried I, springing to my legs with a loud yawn. 'Heaven bless us, my dear Colledge! here are we now, I daresay, a fair thousand miles from the nearest African headland. Surely we are distant enough from all civilisation, then, to be clear of the influence of the girls! Take my advice, and keep your heart whole till you get to India. There may be a Princess waiting for you there, more likely to value a tiger-hide offering than Miss Temple; whilst Miss Craw-

ley's broken heart will mend apace when she learns that your wife has a black skin.'

'Oh, hang it all!' I heard him begin; but I was sick of the subject, and sauntered forth to see what was doing on deck.

There was very little wind; indeed, here and there about the sea were glass-like swathes riding the quiet pulse of the long slow swell in scythe-shaped horns, as though, in fact, there was to be a dead calm anon. Only the topmost and lightest canvas was asleep; the heavier cloths hung up and down with no more of life in them than what they got out of the heave of the ship; and deep as we yet were in the heart of the North Atlantic, there was, it seemed to me, a true tropic touch in the aspect of things—in the clear pale blue of the sky; in the sluggish crawling of the clouds, with their rounded brows stealing out in a copperish hue; in the wavering of the atmosphere over the hot line of the bulwarks, as though there was a sort of steam going up from the wood; in the parched look of the running-gear, and in the salt glistening of the white planks; in the figures of crimson-faced men, their feet naked, their arms and chests bare, again and again coming to the great

scuttle butt, lashed a bit forward of the gangway, and drinking from the metal dipper.

When I arrived on the poop, I found the captain standing aft surrounded by a number of ladies, directing a binocular glass at the sea over the starboard bow. The chief mate at the head of the poop ladder was likewise staring into the same quarter, with Mr. Johnson alongside, bothering him with questions, and little Saunders on tiptoe, to see over the rail, fanning his face with a large flapping black wideawake.

I stepped to the side to look, and saw some object about a mile distant, that emitted a wet flash of light from time to time. I asked the mate to lend me his glass, and at once made the thing out to be a capsized hull of a vessel of about eighty tons. She floated almost to the line of her yellow sheathing, and the gold-like metal rising wet to the sun from the soft sweep of the blue brine darted flashes as dazzling as flame from the mouth of a cannon.

I returned the glass to Mr. Prance.

'She has not been long in that condition, I think?' said I.

'Not twenty-four hours, I should say,' he

answered. 'I see no wreckage floating about her.'

'Nor I. If she had a crew on board when she turned turtle,' I said, 'she may have clapped down upon them as you imprison flies under a tumbler.'

'God bless us, what a dreadful death to die!' cried little Saunders. 'I can conceive of no agony to equal that of being in a cabin in a sinking ship and going down with her, and *knowing* that she is under water and still settling.'

The little chap shuddered and pulled out a great blue pocket-handkerchief, with which he dried his forehead.

'How long could a man live in a cabin under water?' asked Mr. Johnson.

'Long enough to come off with his life,' answered the mate, bringing the glass from his eye and looking at Mr. Johnson. 'I'll give you a queer yarn in a few words, sir; wild enough to furnish out an A1 copper-bottomed sea-tale to some one of you literary gentlemen. A small vessel was dismasted 'twixt Tariffa and Tangier in the middle of the Gut there. All her crew saving one man got away in the boat. The fellow that was left

lay drunk in the cabin. A sea shifted her cargo; shortly after she capsized and went down. A few days later, that same ship floated up from the bottom of the sea on to the shore near Tangier. She was boarded, and they found the man alive in the cabin.'

'What was the vessel's cargo, Mr. Prance?' inquired little Saunders.

'Oil and brandy, sir.'

'Don't you think,' exclaimed Mr. Johnson, 'that your story is one that would be very acceptable to the marines, Mr. Prance, but that would not be believed by your sailors were you to tell it to them?'

Here the captain, who had been slowly coming forward, accompanied by half-a-dozen ladies, interrupted us.

'Mr. Prance.'

'Sir?'

'That object yonder is a danger in the way of navigation. I think it would be kind in us to send a shot at it.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

'We will shift the helm,' continued old Keeling, in the skewered, buttoned-up sort of voice and air he was wont to use when

addressing his mates in the presence of the passengers, 'so as to bring the wreck within reach of our carronades.'

'Very good, sir.'

'I expect,' continued old marline-spike, 'that she is floating on the air in her hold rather than on her cargo, even though it be cork; and if we can knock a hole in her, she will sink.'

Mr. Prance stepped aft to the wheel, and the vessel's course was changed. Instructions went forward; and the boatswain, who combined with his duties the functions of chief-gunner aboard the *Countess Ida*, superintended the loading of a couple of pieces.

'Please tell me when they are going to fire, Mr. Riley, that I may stop my ears,' cried Miss Hudson, who looked a very lovely little woman that morning in a wide straw hat and a body of some muslin-like material, through which the snow of her throat and neck showed, making you think of a white rose in a crystal vase.

Mr. Greenhew, with a glance full of scissors and thumbscrews, as sailors say, at Mr. Riley, told Miss Hudson that if she objected to the noise, he would insist that the gun should not

be fired, and would make it a personal matter between himself and the captain.

'Not for worlds, thank you very much all the same,' said Miss Hudson, sending a languishing look at him through her eyelashes; which, being witnessed by Mr. Riley, would, I did not doubt, occasion a large expenditure of sarcasm between the young men later on.

The motion of the ship was very slow, and we had floated almost imperceptibly down upon the wreck. The skipper then suggested that the ladies should go aft, and off they went in a flutter and huddle of many-coloured gowns, Mrs. Colonel Bannister leading the way, and Mrs. Hudson limping in the wake with her fingers in her ears. A chap with a purple face and immense whiskers was sighting the piece.

'Let fly now, whenever you are ready,' shouted Mr. Prance.

There was a roaring explosion; Mr. Johnson recoiled on to the feet of Mr. Emmett, who shouted with pain, and went hopping to the skylight with a foot in his hand. There were several screeches from the ladies, and methought the whiskers of the colonel, who stood beside me thirstily looking on, forked out with

an added tension of every separate fibre, to the thunder of the gun and the smell of the powder. The ball flew wide.

'Another shot!' called out Mr. Prance.

Bang! went the piece. I had my eye on the wreck at that moment, and saw half the stern-post, from which the rudder was gone, and a few feet of the keel to which it was affixed, vanish like a shattered bottle.

'That's done it!' cried old Keeling with excitement as he stood ogling the wreck through his binocular. 'If a hole that'll let the air out is to sink her, she's as good as foundered.'

He had scarcely said this when there was a sudden roar of voices along the whole length of our ship.

'See! she is full of men!'

'Heart alive, where are they coming from?'

'They're rising as if they were dead bodies, and the last blast was sounding.'

'What'll they be? What'll they be?

'Defend us! they must all be afloat in a minute and drowning!'

Fifty exclamations of this kind rolled along the bulwarks, where the sailors had gathered in their full company to watch the effect of

the shot. There was no glass within reach of me; but my sight was keen, and at the first blush I believed that the hull had been a slaver, that she had capsized when full of negroes, and that our round-shot had made a man-hole aft big enough for them to escape through. There were twenty or thirty of them. They came thrusting through the aperture with extraordinary agility, and most of them held a very firm seat on the clean line of the keel. But every now and again one or another of them would lose his balance and slide down the hard bright surface of the yellow sheathing upon the round of the bilge plump into the water, where you would observe him making frantic but idle efforts to reclimb the wet and slippery slope.

'Monkeys, as I am a man!' roared Mr. Prance.

'A cargo of monkeys, sir!' shouted the skipper from the other end of the poop, whilst he kept his glasses levelled at the wreck.

A sort of groaning note of astonishment, followed by a wild shout of laughter, came along from the Jacks. Indeed, one needed to look hard at the thing to believe in it, so incredibly odd was the incident. One moment

the wreck was a mere curve of naked yellow sheathing flashing to the sun as it rolled; the next, pouff! went the thunder of the gun, and as though its grinning adamantine lips owned some magical and diabolical potency of invocation, lo! the hole made by the shot was vomiting monkeys, and in a trice the radiant rounds of the keel-up fabric were covered with the figures of squatting, clinging, grinning creatures of all sizes, some like little hairy babies, some like men as large at least as Mr. Saunders.

'There'll be a human being rising out of that hole before long, I expect,' said Mr. Prance. 'He must needs be slower than the monkeys if he's a man. How many d'ye make, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Some thirty or forty,' said I. 'But I tell you what, Mr. Prance: there'll be none left in a few minutes, for the hull is sinking rapidly.'

At that instant Captain Keeling sung out: 'Mr. Prance—have one of the quarter-boats manned. It is as I thought—the hull was floating on the air in her hold, and she's settling fast. We can't let those poor creatures drown. Get the main topsail backed.'

A boat's crew came bundling aft to the cry

of the mate; in a mighty hurry the gripes were cast adrift, and the tackles slackened away with the men in their places, and the fourth officer in the stern sheets shipping the rudder as the boat sank. There was a deal of confusion for the moment, what with the tumbling aft of the sailors, the passengers getting out of their road, the hubbub of ladies' voices, and the cries of the seamen dragging upon the weather main-braces to back the yards.

'There she goes!' cried I; 'there'll not be many of the creatures rescued, I believe. Monkeys are indifferent swimmers.'

'Lively now, Mr. Jenkinson,' yelled Mr. Prance to the fourth officer, 'or they'll all be drowned.'

The chaps gave way with a will, and the boat buzzed towards the patch of little black heads that rose and sank upon the swell as though a sack of cocoa-nuts had been capsized out there. All hands stood gazing in silence. The drowning struggle of a single beast is a pitiful sight; but to see a crowd perishing, a whole mob of brutes horribly counterfeiting the aspect and motions of suffering humanity with their faces and gestures, is painful, and

indeed intolerable. The ladies had come to the forward end of the poop out of the way of the seamen pulling upon the main brace, and I found myself next to Miss Temple at the rail.

'They *are* monkeys, I suppose?' she said, swiftly shooting a glance of her black eyes at me, and then staring again seawards with her pale face as passionless as a piece of carving, and nothing to show that she was in the least degree moved by the excitement of the scene of drowning monkeys and speeding boat, saving her parted lips, as though she breathed a little fast.

'They are as much monkeys,' said I, 'as fur and tails can make a creature.'

'Do you suppose there were living people locked up in that hold?'

'God forbid!' said I. 'It is not a thing to conjecture *now*.'

'How could those monkeys have lived without air?'

'Air there must have been, Miss Temple, or they could not have lived. The story of the wreck seems simple enough to my mind. She was, no doubt, a little schooner from the Brazilian coast, bound to a European port

with a freight of monkeys, which are always a saleable commodity. They would be stowed away somewhere aft in the run, perhaps, as it is called. The vessel capsized, and floated, as Captain Keeling suggested, upon the air in her. Our cannon-ball knocked a hole in the hulk right over the monkeys' quarters, and out they came. I can tell you of more wonderful things than that.'

'She must have *capsized*, as you call it, very recently,' said she, glancing at me again —it was rarely more than a glance with her, as though she believed that such beauty as her eyes had entitled them to a royal privacy.

'No doubt,' I answered.

By this time the boat had reached the spot where the hulk had foundered, and we could see the men lying over the side picking up the monkeys. I ran my gaze eagerly over the surface there, somehow fancying that one or more bodies of men might rise; but there was nothing in that way to be seen. The boat lingered with the fellows in her standing up and looking around them. They then reseated themselves, the oars sparkled,

and presently the little fabric came rushing through the water to alongside.

'How many have you picked up, Mr. Jenkinson!' cried the mate.

'Only eight, sir. I believe they were half dead with hunger and thirst, and had no strength to swim, for most of them had sunk before we could approach them.'

'Hand the poor brutes up.'

Some of the Jacks jumped into the chains to receive the creatures, and they were passed over the rail on to the quarter-deck. Deeply as one might pity the unhappy brutes, it was impossible to look at them with a grave face. One of them was an ape with white whiskers like a frill, and a tuft of hair upon his brow that made the rest of his head look bald. He had lost an eye, but the other blinker was so full of human expression that I found myself shaking with laughter as I watched him. He sat on his hams like a Lascar, gazing up at us with his one eye with a wrinkled and grinning countenance of appeal grotesque beyond the wildest fancies of the caricaturist. There was one pretty little chap with red fur upon his breast like a waistcoat. Some of the creatures, on feeling

the warm planks of the deck, lay down in the exact posture of human beings, reposing their heads upon their extended arms and closing their eyes.

'Bo'sun,' called Mr. Prance, 'get those poor beasts forward and have water and food given them. Swing the topsail yard—lee main topsail braces.'

In a few minutes the quarter-deck was clear again, with an ordinary seaman swabbing the wet spaces left by the monkeys, and the ship quietly pushing forwards on her course.

CHAPTER IX

A SECRET BLOW

At sea, a very little thing goes a very long way, and you will suppose that this incident of the monkeys gave us plenty to talk about and to wonder at. At the dinner table that evening old Keeling favoured us with a long yarn about a French craft that capsized somewhere off the Scilly Islands with four men in her: how the air in her hold kept her buoyant; how the fellows climbed into the run and sat with their heads against the ship's bottom; how one of them strove with might and main to knock a plank out, that he might see if help was about, in nowise suspecting that if he let the air escape the hull would sink; how, all unknown to the wretched imprisoned men, a smack fell in with the capsized craft and tried to tow her, but gave up after the line had parted two or three times; how she finally stranded upon one of the

Scilly Isles; and how one of the inhabitants coming down to view the wreck, shot away as though the devil were in chase of him, on hearing the sound of voices inside.

Mr. Johnson whispered to me: 'I *don't* believe it;' and Colonel Bannister listened with a fine incredulous stare fixed upon the skipper's crimson countenance; but the rest of us were vastly interested, especially the elder ladies, who, behind old Keeling's back, spoke of him as 'a love.'

We settled it amongst us to purchase the monkeys from the boat's crew which had rescued them, leaving the ape for the seamen to make a pet of. The matter was talked over at that dinner, and I overheard Miss Temple ask Mr. Colledge to try to secure the little monkey with the red waistcoat for her. She was the only one of the ladies who wanted a monkey.

'Would *you* like one, Miss Hudson?' said I.

She shuddered in the prettiest way.

'Oh, I hate monkeys,' she cried; 'they are so like men, you know!'

'Then, by every law of logic,' bawled the colonel with a loud laugh, 'you must hate

men more, madam. Don't you see?—ha! ha! Why do you hate monkeys? Because they are like men. How much, then, must you hate men, the original of the monkey!'

He roared with laughter again. In fact, there never was a man who more keenly relished his own sallies of wit than Colonel Bannister.

Miss Hudson coloured, and fanned herself.

'I hate monkeys too,' cried Mr. Greenhew, 'and for the reason that makes Miss Hudson averse to them;' and here he looked very hard at the colonel.

'Well, certainly a fellow-feeling don't *always* make us kind,' murmured Mr. Riley in an audible voice, and putting a glass into his eye to look around him as he laughed.

Here the steward said something in a low voice to Mr. Prance, who looked at me, and said in a hollow tragic tone: 'Five of the monkeys have gone dead, sir.'

I called the news down the table to the captain.

'I'm sorry to hear it, Mr. Dugdale,' he answered in a dry voice; 'but you don't want me to open a subscription list for the widows, do ye?'

'Can any one say if the little chap with the red waistcoat's dead?' cried Mr. Colledge.

'Dead hand gone, sir,' exclaimed the cockney head steward.

'What is left of the lot?' inquired Keeling.

'The hape, sir; and the two little chaps that was rescued with their tails half ate up, as is supposed by themselves,' responded the steward.

Mr. Johnson burst out a-laughing.

'Tails eaten up!' cried Mrs. Bannister, poising a pair of gold glasses upon her Roman nose as she addressed the captain. 'Are there any sharks here?'

'I should say not, madam,' answered the skipper. 'It is a trick monkeys fall into of biting their own tails, as human beings gnaw their finger-nails.'

'And when they have consumed their tails, Captain Keeling,' said Mrs. Hudson, in a rather vulgar voice, 'do they go on with the rest of themselves?'

'I believe they are only hindered, madam,' said Keeling, with a grave face, 'by discovering themselves, after a given limit, somewhat inaccessible.'

'I dislike monkeys,' said Mrs. Joliffe to

Mr. Saunders; 'but I should imagine that natural philosophers would find their habits and tastes very interesting subjects for study.'

The little chap moved uneasily in his chair, with a half-glance up and down, to see if anybody smiled.

'The monkey eating his tail,' exclaimed Mr. Emmett, 'is to my mind a very beautiful symbol.'

'Of what?' inquired Mr. Hodder.

'Of a dissipated young man devouring the fortune left him,' answered Mr. Emmett.

'Very true; very good, indeed!' cried Mr. Adams, the lawyer, with a laugh.

The death of the monkeys extinguished the scheme of purchasing them. The one-eyed ape was not to be thought of; and now it was known that the tails of the other survivors were merely stumps, the subject was very unanimously dropped, and the three poor beasts left for the sailors to do what they pleased with.

As an incident, the matter might have served for the day, so dull is life on shipboard with nothing to look forward to but meal-time. But something else was to happen that evening.

Two bells—nine o'clock—had been struck. Most of the passengers were below, for there was a deal of dew in the air, too much of it for the thin dresses of the ladies, who, through the skylight, were to be seen reading and chatting in the cuddy, with a party of whist-players at the table, Mr. Emmett's and Mr. Hodder's noses close together over a crib-bage board, and Colledge at chess with Miss Temple, Miss Hudson opposite, leaning her shining head on her arm bare to the elbow, a faultless limb indeed, watching them. The breeze had freshened at sundown. There was a half-moon in the heavens, with a tropic brightness of disc, and the ocean under her light spread away to its limits in a surface firm and dark as polished indigo, saving that under the planet there was a long trembling wake, and an icy sparkle in the eastern waters, over which some large, most beautiful star was hanging; but though there was breeze enough to put a merry rippling into the sea, the feathering of each little surge was too delicate to catch the eye, unless the white water broke close; and the deep brimmed to the distant luminaries, a mighty shadow.

The skipper was below; Mr. Cocker had

charge of the deck, and I joined him in his walk. He talked of the monkeys, how the poor wretches had died one after another in the forecastle.

'I saw one of them die,' said he: 'upon my life, Mr. Dugdale, it was like seeing a human being expire. I don't wonder women dislike that kind of beasts. For my part, I regard monkeys as poor relations.'

'What were the men laughing at, shortly after we had come up from dinner?' I asked.

'Why, sir, at little John Chinaman. The ape was on the forehatch, secured by a piece of line round his waist. Johnny went to have a look at him. There was nobody about—at least he thought so. He stared hard at the ape, who viewed him eagerly with his one eye, and then said: "I say, where you from, hey?" The ape continued to look. "Oh, you can speakee," continued John; "me savee you can for speakee. Why you no talkee, hey? Me ask where you from? Where you from?" The ape caught a flea. "How you capsize, hey?" asked the Chinese lunatic as gravely, Mr. Dugdale, so the men say, as if he were addressing you or me. "Speakee soft—how you capsize, hey?" This went on, I am

told, for ten minutes, the men meanwhile coming on tip-toe to listen over the forecastle edge till they could stand it no longer, and their roar of laughter was what you heard, sir.'

'A mere bit of sham posture-making in Johnny, don't you think?' said I. 'He might guess the men were listening. Had he been a negro, now. But a Chinaman would very well know that a monkey can't talk.'

'This John is one who doesn't know, I'll swear. Besides, sir, the Chinese are not such geniuses as are imagined. There are thousands amongst them to correspond with our ignorant superstitious peasantry at home. I remember at Chusan that four Chinamen were engaged to carry a piano out of the cabin. Whilst they were wrestling with it on the quarter-deck, a string broke with a loud *twang*, on which they put the instrument down and ran away, viewing it from a distance with faces working with alarm and astonishment. The mate called to know what they meant by dropping their work. "Him spirit! him speakee," they cried; in fact, they would have no more to do with the piano; and when some of the crew picked it

up to carry it to the gangway, the quivering Johns went backing and recoiling on to the forecastle, as though the instrument were a cage with a wild beast in it that might at any moment spring out on them.'

Whilst he was speaking I had been watching a star slowly creeping away from the edge of the mainsail to leeward, as though it were sweeping through the sky on its own account on a course parallel with the line of the horizon. My attention was fixed on what my companion said, and my gaze rested mechanically upon the star. Suddenly the truth flashed upon me, and I started.

'Why, Mr. Cocker, what's happening to the ship? Are we going home again? She is coming-to rapidly! You will be having all your stun'-sails there to larboard aback in a minute.'

He had been too much engrossed by our chat to notice this.

'Wheel there!' he shouted, running aft as he cried. 'What are you doing with the ship? Port your hellum, man, port your hellum!'

I hastily followed, to see what was the matter. The wheel was deserted, and as I

approached, I saw the circle revolve against the stars over the taffrail like a windmill in a gale. Alongside, prone on the deck, his arms outstretched and his face down, was the figure of the helmsman.

'He is in a fit,' cried the second mate, grasping the wheel and revolving it, to bring the ship to her course again.

Here Captain Keeling came hastily up the companion steps.

'Where's the officer of the watch?' he shouted.

'Here, sir,' answered Cocker from the wheel.

'Do you know, sir,' cried the skipper, 'that you are four points off your course?'

'The helmsman has fallen down in a fit, or else lies dead here, sir,' responded the second-mate.

The skipper saw how it was, and bawled for some hands to come aft. Such of the passengers as were on deck gathered about the wheel in a group.

'What is that?' exclaimed little Mr. Saunders, stooping close to the prostrate seaman's head. 'Blood, gentlemen!' he exclaimed. 'See the great stain of it here!

This man has been struck down by some hand.'

'What's that? what's that?' cried old Keeling, bending his crowbar of a figure to the stain. 'Ay, he has been struck down as you say, Mr. Saunders. Who has done this thing? Look about you, men; see if there's anybody concealed here.'

Three or four fellows had come tumbling aft. One took the wheel from the second mate; and the others, along with the midshipmen of the watch, fell to peering under the gratings and into the gig that hung astern flush with the taffrail, and up aloft; but there was nothing living to be found, and the great fabric of mizzen masts and sails whitened to the truck by the moon, and the yard-arms showing in black lines against the stars, soared without blotch or stir, saving here and there a thin shadow upon the pallid cloths creeping to the movement of the spars.

Dr. Hemmeridge now arrived. The seaman, who appeared as dead as a stone, was turned over, and propped by a couple of sailors, and the doctor took a view of him by the help of the binnacle lamp. There was a desperate gash on the left side of the head.

The small straw hat that the poor fellow was wearing was cut through, as though to the clip of a chopper. There was a deal of blood on the deck, and the man's face was ghastly enough, with its beard encrimsoned and dripping, to turn the heart sick.

'Is he dead, think you?' demanded the captain.

'I cannot yet tell,' answered the doctor. 'Raise him, men, and carry him forward at once to his bunk.'

The sailors, followed by the doctor, went staggering shadowily under their burden along the poop and disappeared, leaving a little crowd of us at the wheel dumb with wonder, and looking about us with eyes which gleamed to the flame of the binnacle lamp that Mr. Cocker yet held.

'Now, *how* has this happened?' demanded old Keeling, after a prolonged squint aloft. 'Had you left the deck, Mr. Cocker?'

'No, sir, not for a living instant; Mr. Dugdale will bear witness to that.'

'It is true,' I said.

'Did no man from forward come along the poop?'

'No man, sir; I'll swear it,' answered Mr. Cocker.

'Any of you young gentlemen been aloft?' said Keeling, addressing the midshipmen.

'No, sir,' answered one of them, 'neither aloft nor yet abaft the mizzen rigging for the last half-hour.'

The old chap took the lamp out of Mr. Cocker's hand and looked under the gratings, then got upon them and stared into the gig, as though dissatisfied with the earlier inspection of these hiding-places.

'Most extraordinary!' he exclaimed; 'did some madman do it, and then jump overboard?'

He looked over the sides to port and starboard. The quarter galleries were small, with bumpkins for the main-braces stretching out from them. They were untenanted.

'What was the man's name, Mr. Cocker?'

'Simpson, sir.'

'Was he unpopular forward, do you know? Had he quarrelled lately with any man?'

'I will inquire, sir.'

Old Keeling seemed as bewildered as a person newly awakened from a dream; and, indeed, it was an extraordinary and an in-

credible thing. Mr. Saunders and Mynheer Hemskirk, with one or two others who were on the deck at the time, swore that no man had come aft from the direction of the forecastle. They were conversing in a group a little forward of the mizzen mast, and could take their oaths that there was no living creature abaft that point at the time of the occurrence saving the man who had been so mysteriously felled to the deck.

'He most hov done it himself,' said Hemskirk.

'What! Dealt himself a blow that sheared through his hat into his skull?' cried old Keeling.

'I've been making inquiries, sir,' said the second-mate, approaching us, 'and find that Simpson, instead of being disliked, was a general favourite. No man has been aft, sir.'

'Something must have fallen from the rigging,' said Mr. Saunders.

'Sir,' cried the captain in a voice of mingled wrath and astonishment, 'when anything falls from aloft, it drops plumb, sir—up and down, sir. The law of gravitation, Mr. Saunders, is the same at sea as it is on shore. What could fall from those heights up there'—

and here he turned up his head like a hen in the act of drinking—'to strike a man standing at the wheel all that distance away?'

The news had got wind below, and the passengers came up in twos and threes from the cuddy, asking questions as they arrived, the loudest and most importunate amongst them, needless to say, being Colonel Bannister. There was real consternation amongst the ladies at the sight of the bloodstain. I shall not easily forget the picture of that poop-full of people: the staring of the women at the dark blotch against the wheel, whilst they held themselves in a sort of posture of recoil, holding their dresses back, as if something were crawling at them; the subdued wondering air of the men, restlessly looking about them, one going to the rail to gaze over, the dusky form of another stooping to peer under the gratings, a third with his head lying back straining his sight at the airy empearled spire of the cloths rising from the cross-jack to the royal yard, the mizzen-top showing clear and firm as a drawing in Indian ink against the delicate shimmering concavity of the topsail. The half-moon rode in brilliance over the main top-gallant yard-arm, and the dark swell rolled

in soundless heavings to the quarter, with the wake of the planet lying in the shape of a silver fan to half way across the ocean, and not a cloud in the whole wide velvet-black depths to obscure so much as a thumbnail of stardust.

'What has happened, Dugdale?' exclaimed Colledge, accosting me at once as he rose through the companion with Miss Temple at his side.

'A man that was at the helm has been struck down,' said I.

'By whom?' said he.

'Why, that's it,' I answered; 'nobody knows, and I don't think anybody ever will know.'

'Is he dead?' asked Miss Temple.

'I cannot say,' I responded; 'his hat was cut through and his head laid open. There is a dreadful illustration of what has happened close against the wheel.'

'In what form?' she asked.

'Blood!' said I.

'Why, it's *murder*, then!' cried Colledge.

'It looks like it,' said I, with a glance at Miss Temple's face, that showed white as alabaster to the moonlight, whilst in each glowing dark eye sparkled a little star of silver

far more brilliant than the ice-like flash of the diamonds which trembled in her ears. 'But be the assassin what he may, I'll swear by every saint in the calendar that he's not aboard this ship.'

'Pray, explain, Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed Miss Temple in a voice of curiosity at once haughty and peevish.

I made no answer.

'My dear fellow, what do you want to imply?' said Colledge: 'that the man was struck down—by somebody out of doors?' and his eyes went wandering over the sea.

'It seems my mission, Miss Temple,' said I with a half-laugh, 'to furnish you with information on what happens on board the *Countess Ida*. Once again let me enjoy the privilege you do me the honour to confer upon me;' and with that, in an offhand manner, I told her the story as you have it.

'Did anybody, think you, crawl out of the hind windows,' exclaimed Colledge, 'and creep up over the stern and strike the man down?'

'No,' said I.

'How did it happen, then?' asked Miss Temple fretfully.

'Why,' I answered, looking at her, 'the blow was no doubt dealt by a spirit.'

'Lor' bless us, how terrifying!' exclaimed Mrs. Hudson, who, unknown to me, had drawn to my elbow to listen. 'What with the heat and the sight of that blood!' she cried, fanning herself violently. 'A spirit, did you say, sir? Oh, I shall never be able to sleep in the ship again after this.'

I edged away, finding little pleasure in the prospect of a chat with Mrs. Hudson with Miss Temple close at hand to listen to us. At that moment Dr. Hemmeridge made his appearance. He stalked up to the captain, who stood with his hand gripping the vang of the spanker gaff, returning short almost gruff answers to the questions fired at him.

'The man's alive, sir,' said the doctor; 'but he's badly hurt. I've soldered his wound; but it is an ugly cut.'

'Is he conscious?' demanded Keeling.

'He is.'

'And what does he say?'

'He has nothing to say, sir. How should he remember, Captain Keeling? He fell to the blow as an ox would.'

'Ha!' cried the skipper; 'but does he

recollect seeing anybody lurking near him—has he any suspicion'——

'Sir,' answered the doctor, 'at the present moment his mind has but half an eye open.'

I made one of the crowd that had assembled to hear the doctor's report, and stood near the binnacle stand—close enough to it, in fact, to be able to lay my hand upon the hood. My eye was travelling from the ugly patch that had an appearance as of still sifting out upon the white plank within half a yard of me, when I caught sight of a black lump of something just showing in the curve of the base of the binnacle stand betwixt the starboard legs of it. It was gone in a moment with the slipping off it of the streak of moonshine that had disclosed it to me. Almost mechanically, whilst I continued to listen to the doctor, I put my toe to the thing; then, still in a mechanical way, picked it up. It was a large stone, something of the shape of a comb, with a twist in the middle of it, and of a smooth surface on top, but rugged and broken underneath, with a length of about five inches jagged into an edge as keen as a flint splinter. It was extraordinarily heavy,

and might in that quality have been a lump of gold.

'Hallo!' I cried, 'what have we here?' and I held it to the glass of the binnacle to view it by the lamplight.

'What is that you are looking at, Mr. Dugdale?' called out old Keeling.

'Why,' said I, 'neither more nor less to my mind than the weapon with which your sailor has been laid low, captain.'

There was a rush to look at it. Keeling held it up to the moonlight, then poised it in his hand.

'Who could have been the ruffian that hove it?' he cried.

'Allow me to see it,' exclaimed little Mr. Saunders, and he worked his way, low down amongst us, to the captain. He weighed the stone, smelt it, carefully inspected it, then looked up to the captain with a grin that wrinkled his large, long, eager, wise old face from his brow to his chin. 'A suspicion,' he exclaimed, 'that has been slowly growing in my mind is now confirmed. No mortal hand hove this missile, captain. It comes from the angels, sir.'

He paused.

'Lawk-a-daisy, what is the man going to say next?' cried out Mrs. Hudson hysterically.

'Captain Keeling, ladies and gentlemen,' continued little Saunders, nursing the stone as tenderly while he spoke as if it had been a new-born babe, 'this has fallen from those infinite spangled heights up there. It is, in short, a meteorolite, and, so far as I can now judge, a very beautiful specimen of one.'

CHAPTER X

THE HUMOURS OF AN INDIAMAN

THE mystery being at an end, most of the passengers, after a brief spell of loitering and talking, went below, little Saunders leading the way with the meteorolite, and the captain closing the procession, to finish the glass of grog he had been disturbed at by finding the ship off her course. I was exchanging a few words with Mr. Cocker on this second queer incident of the day, when the fellow who was at the wheel exclaimed: 'Beg pardon, sir;' and I saw him shift very uneasily from one leg to the other with a drag of the length of his arm over his brow, as though he freely perspired.

'What is it?' inquired Mr. Cocker.

'Am I expected to stand here alone, sir?' asked the fellow.

'Certainly. What! On a fine night like this? What do you want? That I should

call hands to the relieving tackles?' cried the second-mate.

The man sent a look up at the stars before answering, with a sort of cowering air in the posture of his head.

'One of them blooming boomerangs,' said he, 'might come along again, sir. What's a man to do if time ain't allowed him to get out of the road?'

'Your having a companion won't help you,' said the second-mate.

'I dunno,' answered the fellow. 'Whatever it be that chucks the like of them things, might hold off at the sight of *two* of us.'

The second-mate stood looking at him a little, and then burst into a laugh.

'Well, well!' said he; 'if there's ever a lead-line to sound the depths of forecastle ignorance, I allow there must be fathoms enough of it to belay an end to the moon's horns.'

Nevertheless he called to one of the watch to come aft and hold the wheel with the other man, making some allowance, I daresay, for the superstitious feelings which possessed the sailor, and which were certainly not to be

softened down by the sight of the great blood-stain close to his feet.

I went below for a glass of brandy, and found the passengers listening to Mr. Saunders, who, with the meteorolite before him, was delivering a discourse on that kind of stone, pointing to it with his finger, speaking very slowly and emphatically, and looking in his wistful way up into the faces of his audience. Even Miss Temple seemed interested, and stood listening with her back against the mizzen-mast, the embellished trunk of which formed a very noble fanciful background for her fine figure. However, I was more in the temper for a pipe of tobacco than for a lecture, and was presently on deck again, for after half-past nine o'clock in the evening we were privileged to smoke upon the poop. Colledge presently joined me ; but in twenty minutes he gave a prodigious yawn and then went to bed ; and I paced the deck alone, with deep enjoyment of the hush coming to the ship out of the dark scintillant distance—a silence of ocean-night that seemed to be deepened to the senses by the marble stillness of the wide white pinions stealing and floating up in a sort of glimmer of spaces to the faint mist-like square of the

main royal. There was a faint noise of trembling and rippling waters over the side, and the line of the taffrail with the two fellows at the wheel rose and fell very softly to the black secret heave of the long deep-sea undulation. The cuddy lamps were dimmed, the interior deserted; there was a small group of smokers on the quarter-deck in the shadow of the bulwark conversing quietly; abaft the mizzen rigging flitted the dusky form of old Keeling, who had come up to take a turn or two and a final squint at the weather before turning in.

Some one emerged through the companion hatch, and, after looking about him a little, crossed to the lee rail, where I was standing.

'Is that you, Dugdale?'

'Yes,' said I. 'What's the matter, Greenhew? Time to be in bed, isn't it?'

'Oh, I say, Dugdale,' exclaimed the young fellow in a breathless kind of way, as though the effort to check some fit of merriment nearly choked him, 'there's such a lark down-stairs —in my cabin—Riley, you know'—— And here he laughed out.

'What's the lark?' I asked.

'I want you to come and see,' he answered. 'I found it out by the merest accident. Heavens,

what capers! And if I don't contrive some excuse to introduce Miss Hudson into the cabin, that she may see him—— Well! well! But come along, though.'

'But, my good fellow, let me first of all know what I am to see,' said I. 'I am enjoying the silence and coolness of this deck and my pipe and'——

He interrupted me as he cautiously stared around him.

'You know, of course, that Riley's got the bunk under me?' he exclaimed in a fluttering voice, as though he should at any moment break out into a loud laugh; 'well, you can make him do whatever you like when he's asleep.'

'Go on,' said I; 'I may understand you presently.'

'When I went to my cabin to turn in,' he continued, 'I found him in bed; and imagining him to be awake, I exclaimed, just as a matter of chaff, you know: "Look out, my friend! There'll be a meteorolite crashing clean through my bunk into your head in a minute—so, mind your eye, Riley!" The moment I said this he hopped out from between his sheets on to the deck, and stood cowering

with his hands over his head, as if to shelter it. His eyes were shut, and I supposed he was playing the fool. "Get back into bed, man," said I; "you can't humbug me." He immediately lay down again in a manner that surprised me, I assure you, Dugdale; for it was as full of obedience as the behaviour of any beaten dog. I watched him a little, to see if he opened his eyes; but he kept them shut, and his breathing proved him fast asleep. I thought I would try him again. "Hi, Riley!" I exclaimed. "Here's Peter Hemskirk come to haul you out of your bunk. Protect yourself, or he'll be dragging you into the cuddy, dressed as you are, and Miss Hudson is there to see you." Instantly, Dugdale '—here he clapped his hands to his lips, to smother a fit of laughter—' he doubled up his fists and let fly at the air, kicking off the clothes, that he might strike out with his legs; and thus he lay working all over like a galvanised frog. You never saw such a sight. Come down and look at him.'

'Have you observed anything of the sort in him before?' said I, knocking the ashes out of my pipe.

'Never before,' he answered; 'but I have

him on the hip now. He's tried to make a fool of me to Miss Hudson, and this blessed evening shows me my way to a very pretty rejoinder. Come along, come along! Should he wake, there can be no performance.'

He went gliding with the step of a skater to the companion, and I followed, scarcely knowing as yet whether the young fellow was not designing in all this some practical joke of which I was to be the victim. We passed through the deserted cuddy, faintly lighted by one dimly burning lantern, and descended to the lower deck, where the corridor between the berths was illuminated by a bull's-eye lamp fixed under a clock against the bulkhead. The cabin shared by the young men stood three doors down past mine on the same side of the ship. Greenhew halted a moment to listen, then turned the handle, took a peep, and beckoned me to enter. Affixed to a stanchion was a small bracket lamp, the glow of which was upon Riley's face as he lay on his back in an under bunk, unmistakably in a deep sleep. His eyes were sealed, his lips parted, his respirations low and deep, as of one who slumbers heavily. The wild disorder

of the bedclothes was corroboration enough of Greenhew's tale, at least in one article of it.

'Try him yourself,' said my companion in a low voice.

'No, no,' I answered. 'I have a sailor's reverence for sleep. You have invited me here to witness a performance. It is for you to make the play, Greenhew.'

He at once cried out: 'Riley! Riley! the ship is sinking! For God's sake strike out, or you're a drowned man!'

I was amazed to observe the young fellow instantly rise to his knees and motion with his arms in the exact manner of a swimmer, yet with a stoop of the head to clear it of the boards of the upper bunk, which I considered as remarkable as any other part of the extraordinary exhibition for the perception that it indicated of surrounding conditions; whilst his gestures on the other hand proved him completely under the control of the delusion created by his cabin-fellow's cry. I also observed an expression of extreme suffering and anxiety in his face, that was made dumb otherwise by the closed lids. In fact it was the countenance of a swimmer battling in

agony. Greenhew looked on half choking with laughter.

'Oh,' he whipped out in disjointed syllables, 'if Miss Hudson could only see him now! Dugdale, you'll have to find me some excuse to introduce her here. Her mother must attend too—the more the merrier!' and here he went off again into a fit, as though he should suffocate.

For my part, I could see nothing to laugh at. Indeed, the thing shocked and astonished me as a painful, degrading, mysterious expression of the human mind acting under conditions of which I could not be expected of course to make head or tail. Riley continued to move his arms with the motions of a swimmer for some minutes, meanwhile breathing hard, as though the water's edge rose to his lip, whilst his face continued drawn out into an indescribable expression of distress. His gesticulations then grew feeble, his respiration lost its fierceness and swiftness and became once more long drawn and regular, and presently he lay back, still in a deep sleep, in the posture in which I had observed him when I entered.

'What d'ye think of *that?*' exclaimed

Greenhew with a face of triumphant enjoyment.

'A pitiful trick for a sleeper to fall into,' said I. 'I like your show so little, Greenhew, that I wish to see no more of it.'

'Oh, nonsense!' he exclaimed; 'let's keep him caper-cutting a while longer. I'll have a regular performance here every night. It shall be the talk of the ship, by George!'

As he spoke these words, Riley uttered a low cry, opened his eyes full upon us, stared a moment with the bewilderment of a man who has not all his senses, then sat upright, running his gaze over his bedclothes.

'What is the matter?' he exclaimed, looking around at us. 'Who has been'——

The light and expression of a full mind entered his eyes. He threw his feet over on to the deck and stood up.

'Have I been making a fool of myself in my sleep, Dugdale?' said he.—I was at a loss for an answer.—He proceeded: 'I know my weakness. I have heard of it often enough—at school—from my mother—again and again since, Dugdale. Greenhew has brought you here to watch me. And that means,' cried he, turning fiercely upon Greenhew, 'that you

have been exercising your humour upon me in my sleep, and instead of compassionating a painful and humiliating infirmity, you have'——

His temper choked him. He clenched his fist and let fly at friend Greenhew right between the eyes. Down went the Civil Service man like a statue knocked off its pedestal; but he was up again in a minute; and neither of them wanting in spunk, at it they went! It was enough to make any man die of laughter to see Riley's very imperfectly clad figure dancing and manœuvring round Greenhew with the gestures of a cannibal at a feast-dance, yet all the while handsomely plumping his fists into his antagonist, who hammered wildly in return with a ruddy nose and one eye already slowly closing. I threw myself between them, but could do little for laughing. They fought in silence, so far at least as their voices were concerned; but the hard thumps they dealt the bulkhead as they went pommelling each other from side to side, not to mention their frequent capsizals over boxes, the flight of any objects, such as boots, which their toes happened to strike against, might well have caused the occupants of the adja-

cent cabins to believe that if this scramble did not signify a rush of people escaping from a sinking ship, then it must certainly mean a desperate mutiny amongst the crew accompanied by all the disorder of a struggle for life.

'For heaven's sake, stop this!' I shouted; 'consider how terrified the ladies will be. Greenhew, cease it, man. Riley, get you into your bunk again'——

Here there was a violent thumping upon the door of the cabin.

'Anybody fallen mad here?' was bawled in the familiar notes of Colonel Bannister, 'or is it murder that's being done?'

He opened the door and looked in.

'Vot, in Got's name, iss happening?' rumbled the deep voice of Peter Hemskirk over the military man's shoulder.

The ship slightly leaned at that moment, and caused the Dutchman to put his weight against the colonel, with the consequence that the little soldier was shot into the cabin with Mynheer at his heels.

'What's this?' cried the colonel.

'I'll teach you!' gasped Riley.

'Haven't you had enough?' shouted Greenhew.

'Seberate 'em! seberate 'em!' exclaimed Hemskirk. 'Look, shentlemen, how Mr. Greenhew bleeds.'

'What on earth is the matter?' exclaimed some one at the door.

It was Mr. Emmett. He trembled, and was very pale. He had thown his tragedian cloak over his shoulders, and looked a truly ludicrous object with a short space of his bare shanks showing and his feet in a pair of large carpet slippers. In fact, by this time the whole of the passengers were alarmed, the ladies looking out of their doors and calling, the men hustling into the passage to see, with the sound of Mr. Prance's voice at the head of the steps of the hatch shouting down to know what the noise was about. It was more than I could stand. The figures of the colonel and the Dutchman and Emmett, not to mention Riley, coming on top of the absurdity of the fight, proved too much for me. I took one look at Greenhew, shot through the door, gained my cabin, and flung myself into my bunk, exhausted with laughter, and utterly incapable of answering

the numberless questions which Colledge fired off at me.

The noise ceased after a while, but not before I heard the captain's storming accents outside my berth. I could also hear the colonel complaining in strong language of so great an outrage as that of two young men fighting in the dead of night within the hearing of ladies. The old skipper insisted on one of the young fellows quitting the cabin and sharing the berth tenanted by Mr. Fairthorne. Both vehemently refused to budge. The captain then asked who struck the first blow. Riley answered that he had, and was beginning to explain, when old Keeling silenced him by saying that he would give him five minutes to retire to Mr. Fairthorne's berth, and that if he had not cleared out by that time he would send for the boatswain and a sailor or two to show him the road. This ended the difficulty, as I was told next morning, and the rest of the night passed quietly enough.

Next day, Mr. Riley put in an appearance at breakfast. On seeing me he came round to my seat, and in a few words begged me not to explain the cause of the quarrel, as he

had no wish that his peculiarity as a sleeper should be known to the rest of us. I gave him my word, but regretted that he should have exacted it, as I wished to talk with Saunders and Hemmeridge on the very extraordinary manifestations I had witnessed. It was fortunate, however, that my share in the disturbance was not guessed at. The colonel, Hemskirk, and the rest imagined that I had been drawn to the young men's berth by the noise, as they had, and no questions were therefore asked me. Mr. Greenhew kept his bed for three days. It was mainly sulking and shame with him, the others thought; but the truth was his eye had not only closed, but was so swollen and blackened as to render him unfit to appear in public. He sent one of the stewards to ask me to see him; but I had had quite enough of Mr. Greenhew, and contrived to keep clear of the youth until his coming on deck made escape from him impossible.

Nothing happened worth noting in the week that followed this business. The trade-wind blew as languid a breeze as ever vexed the heart and inflamed the passions of a ship-master. It was to be a long passage, we all

said—six months, Mr. Johnson predicted—and old Keeling admitted that he had nothing to offer us in the way of hope until we had crossed the equator, where the south-east trades might compensate us for this northern sluggishness by blowing a brisk gale of wind.

However, if the dull crawling of the ship held the spirits of us who lived aft somewhat low, forward the Jacks made sport enough for themselves, and of a second dog-watch were as jolly a lot as ever fetched an echo out of a hollow topsail with salt-hardened lungs. There were a couple of excellent fiddlers amongst them, and these chaps would perch themselves upon the booms, and with bowed heads and quivering arms saw endless dance-tunes out of the catgut. Many a half-hour have I pleasantly killed in watching and hearkening to the forecastle frolics. The squeaking of the fiddles was the right sort of music for the show; the Jacks in couples lovingly embracing each other, slided, twirled, frisked, polked with loose delighted limbs between the forecastle rails, their hairy faces grinning over each other's shoulders; or one of them would take the deck—the rest drawing off to smoke a pipe and look on

—and break into a noble maritime shuffle—the true deep-sea hornpipe—always dancing it to perfection, as I would think. One such scene I vividly recall as I sit writing: a tar of manly proportions, a little way past the forecastle ladder, plain in the view of the poop, his shoes twinkling, his flowing duck breeches trembling, his arms folded, or one hand gracefully arching to his head, his straw hat on nine hairs, his face between his broad black whiskers showing out in the hue of claret, his little eyes sparkling with the enjoyment of the measures, and the perspiration hopping off his nose like parched peas; past him a crowd of storm-dyed faces meditatively surveying him, gnawing with excitement upon the junks standing high in their cheeks in their sympathy with the dancer, or pulling their pipes from their lips with the slow deliberateness of the merchant sailor to expectorate and growl out a comment upon the capering lively; to the right of him amidships on the booms the two fiddlers, working their hardest, and threatening every moment to topple over on to the deck with the energy of their movements. Far ahead forked out the great bow-sprit and

jib-booms, made massive to the eye by the long spritsail yard and the enormously thick gear of shrouds and guys; on high rose the canvas at the fore, yellowing as it soared into a golden tinge to the westering glory that was setting the heavens on fire on the starboard beam. Oh! it was a sight beautiful exceedingly, with the gilding of the ropes by the sunset to the complexion of golden wire, and a long line of blood-red radiance flowing down to the ship from the horizon, and making a sparkling scarlet of the fabric's glossy sides, and putting a crimson star of splendour into every window, with the sweep of the dark-blue sea coursing in long lines into the east, that showed in a liquid softness of violet past the wan spaces of the far overhanging studdingsails.

In this same week about which I am writing, Mr. Colledge, inspired possibly by the noise of the fiddles forward and the spectacle of the forecastle jinks, made an effort to get up a dance aft; but to no purpose. Some of the girls looked eagerly when the thing was suggested; and certainly Colledge's programme was a promising one: there was the wide spread of awning for a ballroom ceiling;

there were flags in abundance to stretch between the ridge-rope and the rail, as a wall of radiant colours through which the moon would sift her delicate tender haze without injury to the light of the lanterns, which were to be hung in a row on either side fore and aft; there was the piano to rouse up from its moorings below, and to be secured on some part of the deck where its tinkling could be everywhere heard. There was also a quiet sea, and a deck whose gentle cradling could but serve as a pulse to the joyous revolutions of the waltz.

Colledge was enchanted with his scheme, and went about thirstily in the prosecution of it; but, as I have said, to no purpose. Colonel Bannister shouted with derision when asked if he would dance; Greenhew was not yet well of his eye, was extremely sulky, and hung about in retired places; Riley called dancing a bore; Fairthorne pleaded tender feet; little Saunders smote his breast to Colledge's inquiry and said plaintively: 'Who would stand up with *me*?' In short, every man-jack of us aft, saving Mr. Johnson and myself, declined to take any active part in the proposed ball; and Colledge, with a face of loathing, aban-

doned the idea, vowing to me that he had never met with such a pack of scarecrows in his life, and that we should have been better off in the direction of jollity and companionship had the cargo of monkeys been spared to take the place of our male passengers.

Thus did we somewhat wearily roll our way through the Atlantic parallels, fanned by a light north-east wind over the quarter, under a heaven of blue, with the sun in the midst of it splendidly shining, and a night-sky of airy indigo rich with stars from sea-line to sea-line. The flying-fish shot from the coppered sides of the Indiaman, but saving them and ourselves, the ocean was tenantless of life; we sighted no ship; no bird hovered near us; once only, when it was drawing near to midnight, I heard the sounds of a deep respiration off one or the other of the bows—the noise of some leviathan of the deep rising from the dark profound to blow his fountain under the stars; but there was no shadow of it to be seen nor break of white waters to indicate its neighbourhood. It was but a single sigh, deep and solemn, as though old ocean himself had delivered it out of his heart, and the glittering heights seemed to gather a deeper mystery from the mere note of it.

CHAPTER XI

A STRANGE SAIL

It was a Friday morning. On going on deck before breakfast for a pump-bath in the ship's head, I found as queer a look of weather all about as ever I had witnessed in my life. A troubled swell, but without much height or power, was running from the westwards, and the Indiaman rolled awkwardly upon it with much noise of beating canvas aloft and of straining spars. The water was of a dull olive tint, with an appearance of mud in it, as though some violent disturbance at bottom had lifted the ooze cloudily to the surface. It was hard to tell whether the sky was blue or slate, so thick, dusty, impervious was it, with here and there a dim outline of cloud, and patches, so to speak, of a kind of yellowish blue, where some belly of obscured vapour stooped lower than the rest; whilst, the whole sea-circle round, there hovered an

immense grummet or ring of a dingy, sooty appearance, like to a line of smoke left by the funnels of steamers, and hanging in a brown cloud, leagues in length, in silent motionless weather on the rim of the waters of the English Channel.

'Hallo, Mr. Smallridge,' said I, as I stepped over the rail out of the head, addressing the boatswain, who was superintending the work of a couple of hands slung over the bow, 'what have we yonder?' and I sent my gaze at a sail I had now for the first time caught sight of that was hovering down upon our port quarter some two or three miles distant.

'A brig, sir, I believe,' he answered; 'she was in sight much about the same place at daybreak. There's been a little air of wind, but it's failing, I doubt.'

'Making way for something to follow, I fancy?' said I, casting a look round the horizon.

'Ay,' he answered; 'that muck's a-drawing up, and there'll be thunder in it too, if my corns speaks right. Niver had no such aching in my toes as this morning since last Toosday was two year, when we fell in off the Hope with the ugliest thunderstorm that I can

remember south of the heequator. When my corns begins to squirm I always know that thunder ain't fur off.'

'Well, thunder or no thunder,' said I, 'I hope there's to come wind enough in the wake of all this to blow us along. We shall be having to call it sixty days to the Line, bo'sun, if we don't mind our eye;' and giving him a friendly nod, I made my way to my cabin to finish dressing.

The gloomy appearance continued all the morning without the least change. The wind fell dead; and a prodigious hush overhung the sea, a stillness that grew absolutely overwhelming to the fancy, if you gave your mind to it, and stood watching the heave of the swell running in ugly green heaps without a sound. Noises were curiously distinct. The voice of a man hailing the forecastle from the foretopmast crosstrees sounded on the poop as though he had called from the maintop. A laugh from near the wheel had a startlingly near note, though it came to you along the whole length of the after-deck. The water brimming to the channels alongside to the stoop of the hull sent the oddest hollowest sobbing tone into the air, as though some

monster were strangling alongside. Halliards had been let go and sails clewed up and hauled down, and the *Countess Ida* lay with something of a naked look as she wallowed with the clumsiness of a wide-beamed ship under topsails and fore course; and all the rest of the square canvas, saving the royals and mizzen topgallant-sail, which were furled, swinging in and out festooned by the grip of the gear.

By noon the sail that I had noticed early that morning had neared us in some insensible fashion till she hung something more than a mile away off the quarter as before. I had several times examined her with the telescope and was not a little impressed by her appearance. She was a brig of about two hundred and sixty tons; a most beautiful and perfect model, indeed, with a clipper lift of bow and a knife-like cutwater and a long wonderfully graceful arching sweep of side rounding into the very perfection of a run. Her copper came high, and was very clean, as though she were fresh from port. Her masts were singularly lofty for her size, both of them tapering away into skysail poles with yards across; but she had furled all canvas down to her

two topsails and foresail, and lay rolling heavily, lifting her symmetrical fabric to the height of the swell, when she would be hove out against the ugly sulky background in such keen relief that her rigging glanced like hairs as it came from the mastheads to the channels, with a white, odd, almost ghastly stare in her canvas that was brilliant as cotton ; then down she would sink behind some sullen almost livid peak till she was hidden to the reef-band of her fore-course.

Throughout the morning I had observed Captain Keeling somewhat restlessly examining her ; that is to say, he would send looks enough at her through his binocular glass to suggest that he found something unusual, perhaps disturbing, in her appearance. There were no sights to be had, though the old fellow and his two mates stood about the deck, sextants in hands, occasionally lifting their eyes to that part of the sky where the sun was supposed to be. Observing Mr. Prance at the rail, steadfastly observing the brig down upon the quarter, I went up to him.

'Pray what do you find in that craft yonder, Mr. Prance, to interest you? The skipper does not seem able to keep his glass off her.'

'What do *you* see, Mr. Dugdale?' he answered, viewing me out of the corners of his eyes without turning his head. 'Come, you have been a sailor. What is *your* notion of her?'

'She's a beauty, anyway,' I answered; 'no builder's yard ever turned out anything sweeter in the shape of a hull—a trifle too lofty, perhaps. For my part, I hate everything above royals. Give me short mastheads, the royal-yard sitting close under the truck, English frigate-fashion '— I was proceeding.

'No, no; I don't mean that, Mr. Dugdale,' he interrupted with a hint of a seaman's impatience at my criticism.

'What, then?' I asked.

'Does she look honest, think you?' said he.

'Ha!' cried I: 'now I understand.'

'Hush! not a word if you please,' he exclaimed with a glance along the poop; 'the ladies must on no account be frightened, and it is but a mere suspicion on Captain Keeling's part at best. Yet he has had some acquaintance with gentry of her kind, if, indeed, yonder chap be of the denomination he conjectures.'

'She must have been stealthily sneaking

down upon us,' I exclaimed, 'to occupy her present position, otherwise she should be a league distant out on the beam. But then such a hull as that must yield to a catspaw that wouldn't blow a feather out of the *Countess Ida's* mizzen-top. What has been seen to excite misgiving, Mr. Prance?'

'Too many of a crew, sir,' he answered; 'the outline of a long-tom on her forecastle, but ill-concealed by the raffle thrown over it. Six guns of a side, Mr. Dugdale, though the closed ports hide their grins.'

'She will not attempt anything with a big chap like us, surely.'

At that moment the captain called him, and he walked aft.

Presently, it sensibly darkened, as though to the passage of some denser sheet of vapour crawling through the heart of the obscurity on high. The sea turned of an oil-like smoothness, and ran in folds as of liquid bottle-green glass out of the grimy shadow that was slowly thickening all away round the ocean limit. The order was given to furl the clewed-up sails and to reef the topsails. The boatswain's pipe summoned all hands to this work, and the ship for a while was full of life and commotion.

However, by this time the secret of old Keeling's uneasiness had in some way leaked out; in fact, the skipper could no longer have kept the people in ignorance of his suspicions; for some ten minutes or so before the tiffin bell rang, after the hands had come down from aloft, the order was quietly sent along to see all clear for action; and as I took my seat at table, being close to the cuddy front, as my chair brought me with a clear view of the quarter-deck through the open windows, I could observe the men preparing our little show of carronades, removing the tompions, placing rams, sponges, train-tackles, and the like at hand, and passing shot and chests of small-arms through the main hatch.

Captain Keeling, stiff, and bolstered up as usual in his brass-buttoned frock coat, his face of a deeper rubicund from some recent touch of soap and towel, seated himself at the head of the table; but Prance and the other mates remained on deck. One noticed a deal of uneasiness amongst the ladies, saving Miss Temple whose haughty beautiful face wore its ordinary impassive expression. There was no coquetry in the startled eyes that Miss Hudson rolled around. Mrs. Bannister fanned herself ve-

hemently, and ate nothing. There were some of us males, too, who looked as if we didn't like it. Mr. Emmett was exceedingly thoughtful; Mr. Fairthorne drank thirstily, and pulled incessantly at his little sprouting moustache; Mr. Hodder watched old Keeling continuously; and Mr. Riley made much of his eye-glass. Nothing to the point was said for a little while; then the colonel rapped out:

'I say, captain, have you any notion as to the nationality of that chap whom your people are making ready to resist?'

'No, sir,' answered Keeling stiffly; 'we gave her a sight of our ensign this morning; but she showed no colours in return, and I am not a man to keep my hat off to one who will not respond.'

'Dot iss my vay,' exclaimed Peter Hemskirk, bestowing a train of nods on the skipper.

'But, captain,' said Mrs. Joliffe, a nervous gentle-faced middle-aged lady, with soft white hair, 'have you any good reason for supposing that the ship may prove dangerous to us?'

'Madam,' responded Keeling with a bow, and you noticed the prevailing condition amongst us by the general nervous inclining of ears towards the old fellow to catch what

he said, 'there is reason to believe that certain Spaniards of the island of Cuba have equipped two or three smart vessels to act the part of marine highwaymen. The authorities wink at the business, I am told. Their practice is to bring ships to and board them, and plunder the best of what they may come across. Last year, a West Indiaman named the *Jamaica Belle* was overhauled by one of these craft, who took specie amounting to twelve thousand pounds out of her. I believe they are not cut-throats in the old piratic sense.'

'Oh, don't speak of cut-throats!' cried Mrs. Hudson. 'Will they dare to attack us —the monsters!'

'Ladies and gentlemen,' said Keeling, 'pray, clearly understand: my suspicions of the stranger may be ill-founded. Meanwhile, our business is to put ourselves in a posture of defence, ready for whatever may happen.'

'Certainly,' exclaimed the colonel very emphatically with a look round; and then speaking with his eyes fixed upon Mr. Johnson; 'I presume we shall be able to count upon all our male friends here assembled to assist your crew to the utmost of their powers, should the stranger make any attempt upon this ship?'

'We shall expect you to cover yourself with glory, colonel,' said Mr. Johnson, in a familiar sarcastic voice; 'and I shall be happy to write and print a full description of your behaviour, sir.'

'I am quite willing to fight,' exclaimed Mr. Fairthorne in an effeminate voice. 'I mean that I shall be glad to thoot; but I am no thwordthman.'

'Possengers hov no beesness to vight,' exclaimed Mynheer Hemskirk, enlarging his immense waistcoat by obtruding his chest; 'dey gets in der vay of dem as knows vot to do.'

Miss Temple bit her lip to conceal a smile.

'That's all very well,' exclaimed Riley, talking at Miss Hudson; 'but suppose, Hemskirk, you should find some greasy Spaniard with earrings and oily ringlets rifling your boxes, hauling out all the money you've got, pocketing that fine silver-mounted meerschaum pipe of yours'——

'I vould coot orff hiss head,' answered the Dutchman, breathing hard.

'Gentlemen, you are unnecessarily alarming the ladies,' cried old marline-spike from the head of the table.

'I suppose there's no lack of small-arms

with you, captain?' roared the Colonel; 'plenty for us here as well as for your men?'

'I shall insist upon your not meddling, Edward, in whatever may happen,' cried his wife, giving him an emphatic nod over the edge of her fan with her Roman nose.

'I shall meddle, then, my dear,' he shouted. 'If it comes to those rascals attacking us, I shall fight, as of course we all will,' and again he bent his little fiery eyes upon Mr. Johnson.

'My note-book is ready, colonel,' said Mr. Johnson pleasantly, with a satirical grin at the peppery little soldier. 'I'll not lose sight of you, sir.'

'I believe you will then, sir,' sneered the colonel, 'unless Captain Keeling takes the precaution to clap his hatches on to prevent anybody skulking below from off the deck.'

'Mere bluster is not going to help us,' said Colledge, who disliked the colonel; 'no good in railing and storming like heroes in a blank-verse performance for an hour at a time before falling to. If Captain Keeling wants any assistance outside that of his crew, he may command me for one.'

'I wath never taught fenthing,' said

Mr. Fairthorne; 'if I fight, it mutht be with a muthket.'

'If the ship should be captured, what's to become of us?' cried Mrs. Hudson. 'I've read the most barbarous histories about pirates. They have no respect for sex or age; and it's quite common, I've heard, for every pirate to have twelve wives.'

Here Mrs. Trevor suddenly shrieked out for some one to bring her baby to her, then went into hysterics, and was presently carried away in a dead faint by the stewards, followed by her daughter, weeping bitterly. Old Keeling whipped out an oath.

'Now, gentlemen,' he exclaimed, 'you see what your conversation has brought about. Ladies, I beg that you will not be uneasy. The stranger will give us no trouble, I am persuaded;' and rising with a look of contempt, he bowed stiffly to Miss Temple and her aunt, and went on deck.

I was too curious to observe what was going forward to linger in the cuddy amid this idle rattle of tongues. Our ship having no steerage-way, had slewed to the beat of the swell, and the brig was now off the starboard bow, pretty much distant as she had been

when we went to lunch, but showing out with amazing clearness against the sooty sky past her, upon which her topsails swung from side to side so heavily that the lower yard-arms at times seemed to spear the water lifting to them in hills. All over and beyond her lay a deep shadow of thunder, a sky scowling to the zenith thick as though viewed through a dust-storm, with a vision of the tufted cloud of the electric tempest hovering here and there; but there was no lightning as yet, no echo of distant grumbling; there was not a breath of air to cool the moistened lip, and the noiseless heave of the swell was as though old ocean lay breathing hard in a posture of dumb expectation.

Our crew hung about the decks in groups ready to spring to the first command. Iron stanchions had been fitted into the line of the rails, and boarding-nets triced up the length of the ship from just before the fore-rigging to the poop rail. Aft was a small gang of seamen stationed at each gun there, with all necessary machinery for the artillery at hand. The captain, the chief mate, and Mr. Cocker stood abreast of the wheel, looking at the brig with an occasional glance round the sea

at the weather. I stepped to the side to take another view of the stranger, and I was noticing with admiration the toy-like beauty of her as she soared with ruddy sheathing to the head of a swell, with now and again a most delicate echo of the clapping and beating of her canvas stealing to us through the dark, breathless atmosphere, when I was accosted by some one at my elbow.

'Do you think it possible, Mr. Dugdale, that if that vessel fired at our ship she could hit us, so violently rolling as she is?'

I turned. It was Mrs. Radcliffe, and with her was Miss Temple. With the exception of a 'good morning' or a 'good night,' I had never exchanged a syllable with this lady in all the time she and I had been together on shipboard. Her kind little face fluttered jerkily at me as she asked the question in a manner to remind one of the movements of the head of a hen. Miss Temple stood like a statue, swaying to the majestic perpendicular of her figure upon the rolling deck without the least visible effort to keep her balance, her dark and shining eyes fixed upon the brig.

'Her gunners,' said I, 'would need to be

practised marksmen, I should say, to hit us from such a tumbling platform as that yonder.'

'Just my opinion, as I told you, Louise,' she exclaimed.

'If she were to begin to fire,' exclaimed the girl, keeping her gaze bent seawards, 'she would be sure to hit us, though it were by chance.'

'Very possibly,' said I.

'There will be some wind soon, I think, don't you?' said Mrs. Radcliffe.

'I hope so,' I answered.

'In that case,' said she, 'we shall be able to sail away and escape, shan't we?'

'She will chase us,' exclaimed Miss Temple; 'and as she sails faster than we do, she will catch us!'

'Now, is that likely?' cried Mrs. Radcliffe, with a nervous toss of her head at me.

'Everything is possible at sea,' said I, laughing; 'but there is a deal in our favour, Mrs. Radcliffe: first the weather, that as good as disables that fellow at present anyway; then the coming on of the night, with every prospect of losing the brig in the darkness.'

'Would you advocate our running away

from him?' exclaimed Miss Temple, looking at me with a fulness and firmness that was as embarrassing and vexing in its way as an impertinent stare.

'Oh, yes,' said I; 'certainly. We are a peaceful trader. It is our business to arrive in India sound in body'——

'I should consider,' said she, gazing at me as if she would subdue me into acquiescence in anything she chose to say by merely eyeing me strenuously, 'that Captain Keeling would be acting the part of a coward if he ran away from that little vessel.'

'Oh, Louise, how can you talk so!' cried Mrs. Radcliffe, with a sort of despairful toss of her hands.

'I should like to see a fight between two ships,' said the girl, removing her overbearing eyes from my face to send them over the deck amongst the groups of men. 'Of course, if that vessel attacks us, we ladies will be sent below to rend the cabin with our screams at every broadside; but I, for one, am perfectly willing, if the captain consents, to shoot at those people through a porthole.'

'Oh, Louise, the whims which possess you are really dreadful!' cried Mrs. Radcliffe:

'imagine, if you should even wound a man! it would make you miserable for life; perhaps end in your becoming a Roman Catholic and going into a convent. Think of that.'

Miss Temple looked at her aunt with a little curl of her lip.

'I do not know,' she exclaimed, 'why it should be more dreadful in a woman to defend her life than in a man. Nobody, I suppose, wishes to hurt those people; but if they attempt to hurt us, why should we women feel shocked at the notion of our helping the sailors to protect the ship by any means in our power? I am like Mr. Fairthorne,' she continued, with a sarcastic glance at me; 'I could not fight with a sword, but I can certainly pull the trigger of a musket.'

'It is really hardly lady-like, my dear,' began Mrs. Radcliffe.

'Nonsense, aunt! Lady-like! Is it more genteel to fall into hysterics and swoon away, than to take aim at a wicked wretch who will have your life if you don't take his?' and as she said this, she whipped a cotton umbrella out of her aunt's hand, and putting it to her shoulder, as though it were a gun, levelled it at the brig.

Colledge, who was standing at a little distance away, talking to two or three of the passengers, clapped his hands and laughed out. For my part, I could not take my eyes off her, so fascinating were the beauties of her fine form in that posture, her head drooped in the attitude of the marksman, and her marble-like profile showing out clear as a cutting in ivory against the soft shadowy mass of gloom of the sky astern.

Mrs. Radcliffe again tossed her arms in a despairful gesture, with a pecking, so to speak, of her face at the gangs of men on the quarter-deck and waist; and then making a little flurried snatch at her umbrella, she passed her arm through her niece's, exclaiming: 'Help me to reach the cuddy, my dear. There's a thunderstorm brewing, I'm sure, and I'm afraid of lightning.' She made me a little staggering curtsey, and walked with Miss Temple to the companion, down which the pair of them went, followed by Mr. Colledge, who I could hear complimenting Miss Temple on her resolution to fight the enemy, if the stranger should prove one.

A few minutes later Mr. Emmett and Mr.

Johnson approached me, bumping against each other like a brace of lighters in a seaway as they struck out on the swaying deck with their staggering legs.

'I say, Dugdale,' cried the journalist, 'shall you fight?'

'Why, yes,' I answered. 'We shall all be expected to help the crew certainly.'

'I don't see that!' exclaimed Mr. Emmett, drawing his wide-awake down to his nose and folding his arms with a tragic gesture upon his breast, whilst he swung his figure from side to side on wide-stretched legs. 'It's all very fine to expect; but I agree with Johnson, whose argument is, that we have paid our money to be transported in safety to Bombay; and I cannot for the life of me see that the captain has any right to look for co-operation at our hands, unless, indeed, he so contrives it as to enable us to help him without imperilling our lives.'

'But that fellow yonder may be full of ruffians, Emmett,' said I; 'and if you do not help our sailors to defend the *Countess Ida*, they may board us; and then they will cut your throat,' I added, with a look at his long neck, 'which is no very agreeable sensation, I believe,

and an experience quite worth a pinch of heroism to evade.'

'It's a beastly business altogether,' said he, wrinkling his nose as he stared at the brig.

'But why should they board us?' exclaimed Mr. Johnson. 'If they do, it will be the captain's fault. Why does he want to go on sticking *here* for, as if, by George! we were a man-of-war with three decks bristling with guns and crammed to suffocation with men?'

'There is no wind,' said I; 'and without wind, Johnson, ships cannot sail.'

'Then why the confounded dickens don't he lower all the boats,' he cried, 'and fill them with sailors, and tug the ship out of sight of that beast there?'

I laughed outright.

'Well, I'm not in the habit of using strong language,' said Mr. Emmett, scowling at the brig; 'but curse me if I'm going to fight. My simple contention is, I've paid my money to be transported peacefully to India; and,' added he, with a glance aft at old Keeling, who was staring up at the sky, as though to observe if there were any drift in the vapour up there, 'if he don't fulfil his undertaking, I'll sue him or his owners for breach of contract.'

'I'm no sailor,' exclaimed Mr. Johnson, 'but I may claim to have some intelligence as a landsman, and my argument is,' he cried, talking in a loud voice, 'that it is quite in Captain Keeling's power to launch the boats and drag the ship away from this spot. In an hour the brig would be out of sight.'

At that instant there was a flash of lightning that made a crimson dazzle of the dark heavens beyond the brig, where the sky sloped in a horrible yellowish slate colour into the sooty thickness which circled the horizon.

'Ha!' cried Mr. Emmett, 'I don't like lightning;' and he abruptly trundled down the poop ladder to the quarter-deck and disappeared.

'Here's a mess to be in!' grumbled Johnson. 'It's all very well to shoot or be shot at if you make butchery a profession. But to be maimed or killed in some cheap affray—having to fight for people you don't care a hang about—obliged, for instance, to jeopardise your eyes, your limbs, perhaps your very existence, for an old woman like Mrs. Bannister, when the business is not in one's line at all—' He clenched his fist, and fetching

his thigh a whack with it, exclaimed: 'Let little hectoring Colonel Cock-a-doodle-doo cut as many throats as he can come at—I am a man of peace. I have parted with a large sum to get to India in comfort; and to expect me to help the sailors to fight is as monstrous as to look to me to assist them in furling the sails and scrubbing the decks.'

Thus speaking, he followed Mr. Emmett down on to the quarter-deck.

CHAPTER XII

A STORM OF WIND

THE atmosphere now took a deeper tinge of gloom. Thunder had followed the blaze of lightning in the west, low, distant, but continuous, like a rapid succession of the batteries of several ships of war heard from afar; and as the echoes of this ominous growling swept to our ears over the glass-smooth heave of the swell, the fresh dye of gloom came into the day and made an evening darkness of the afternoon.

The noise of the thunder had been like calling a hush upon the ship. The men hung in silent groups along the decks; motionless at the wheel was the tall form of a powerful sailor gripping the spokes with an iron clutch that was scarcely to be shaken by the frequent hard drag of the tiller-gear to the kick of the rudder; the seamen stationed at the guns aft stood with folded arms or hands

carelessly thrust into their pockets gazing at the brig, or, with the impatient looks of sailors kept idly waiting on deck during their watch below, directing glances at the horizon or the sky, as though in search of some sign of wind. The three mates continued to overhang the rail near the captain, who walked the length of a plank to and fro with a telescope under his arm, which he would sometimes level at the brig, afterwards addressing his officers in a low voice.

All the ladies were below; but shortly after Mr. Johnson had left me, Miss Temple came on deck and went to the side to look at the stranger, and there lingered, with her gaze upon the western sky, over which the lightning was now running in fluid lines, a cascading of fiery streaks with a frequent dull opening blaze low down, which the heads of the swell would catch and mirror as though it were an instant gleam of sunset. Had she condescended to glance my way, I should have joined her. She loitered a while, and then left the deck; and at the same moment the second-mate came forward to the break of the poop and called out an order for the foresail

and mizzen topsail to be furled and the foretopsail to be close reefed.

'Very unpleasant state of suspense this,' said little Mr. Saunders, stealing to my side and looking up into my face.

'Very,' I answered; 'but it seems as if the weather was to extinguish our anxiety as regards the brig.'

'Yes,' said he. 'I heard the captain tell Mr. Prance that he believes there is a gale of wind behind that storm yonder. Gracious me! what a very vivid flash. Hark! it nears us quickly.'

There was a rattling peal of thunder now, a long volleying roar of it, and a few large drops of rain fell. Mr. Cocker stood at the rail with a telescope in his hand. He busily watched the men up aloft, sometimes letting fly an order to the boatswain in a voice that went past the ear like a stone from a sling. A large drop of rain splashed upon Mr. Saunders's nose.

'It's about to burst, I think,' said he, looking straight up into the heavens with his modest yearning eyes. 'I shall go below;' and down trotted the little creature.

'Mr. Cocker,' said I, 'lend me your glass

for an instant, will you?' I pointed it at the brig. 'Yes,' I exclaimed, talking to the second-mate with the telescope at my eye; 'I believe I was not mistaken. Full of men, indeed! Phew! Why, there are hands enough upon her yards to furnish out the complement of a fifty-gun frigate.'

It was indeed as I said. They were furling all canvas upon the stranger, intending apparently to let her meet what was to come with a small storm foretrysail, which I could see a crowd of seamen bending and making ready for setting. Her fore and topsail yards were loaded with men swarming like bees along the thin delicate lines of spars, and even as I watched, the canvas they were rolling up melted away into slender streaks of white. In the cross-trees of both masts, and higher yet on the yards above, and in the tops also, were a number of men busily employed in sending down the royal, skysail, and topgallant yards and housing the topgallant masts. There looked to me to be at least a hundred of a crew to the vessel.

You found something almost ghastly and absolutely startling in the sharp distinctness of the little fabric rolling against the thunder-

black skies behind her, and upon the long, malignant, greenish-hued swell in which the plunging lightning was sparkling as though the water were crackling with phosphoric fires. Dark as the atmosphere was with the deep shadow of storm, the brig stood out to the eye visible to the minutest detail the sight could reach to, plunging heavily under her naked spars, with her wet black sides darting out the mirrored flame of the lightning flashes with as clear a dazzle as glass or polished brass would throw.

'The number of her crew witnesses to her character,' said I, returning the telescope to Mr. Cocker.

'Oh, there is no doubt of her,' he exclaimed; 'the captain's an old hand, and twigged her speedily.'

'The weather will put an end to her, I expect,' said I. 'Very lucky for us, Mr. Cocker. A large crew of ruffians and six guns of a side, not to mention a twenty-four pounder in the bows, and cutlasses and small arms in galore, hardly form a joke. It is easy to figure the beauty, that sails, I daresay, three feet to our one, quietly sheering alongside and throwing seventy or eighty of her children

aboard, dark-skinned assassins, armed to the teeth, reeking of garlic. Well, hang me, Mr. Cocker, if I didn't believe that the times of those gentry had passed some years ago.'

His lips were moving to answer me, but there was a wide and blinding flash of lightning at that instant that set the heavens on fire, immediately followed by a crash of thunder as deafening as though a first-rate had blown up close aboard us. Yet again the scowl of the clouds deepened in darkness, and the brig grew vague on a sudden in the gloom of the storm.

'There comes the rain!' cried Mr. Cocker, pointing to a line of greyish shadow with a look of steam boiling up as it were from the base of it. It drew creeping slowly on to the brig, and its perpendicular fall made one think of it as of a vast sheet of water up above overflowing and cataracting sheer down over the edge of a cloud.

'There is no wind there,' said I; 'it is a regular Irishman's hurricane, right up and down. But here goes for a waterproof.'

I trundled below for a suit of rubber clothes, being too anxious to observe what

was to happen to choose to leave the deck. All the passengers were congregated in the cuddy, and the lightning, as it glittered in the portholes and skylights, flashed up their faces in the gloomy atmosphere, making them look a pale and trembling crowd. The colonel was pacing the deck near the piano. Miss Hudson leaned against her mother with her hands over her eyes. If ever there came a brighter flash than usual, one lady or another would scream. Colledge and Miss Temple sat over a draught-board; but I could not gather, from the hurried glance I threw over the people as I passed through them, that they were playing. I equipped myself from head to foot in waterproofs and came again into the saloon on my way to the poop.

'Are you going on deck, Dugdale?' cried Mr. Johnson, shouting aloud, to render his voice audible above the continuous cannonading of the thunder.

'Yes,' I replied.

'You will be struck dead, sir,' called out Mrs. Hudson.

'I have half a mind to join you,' said Mr. Emmett, jumping up with a wild look at the skylight: 'it's simply beastly down here.'

'Hark to that!' bawled the colonel; 'there's a shower for you!'

The wall of rain had reached us. For a minute before it struck the ship you could hear it hissing upon the sea like twenty locomotives blowing off steam; then plump! came the cataract on to our decks. Had every drop been a brick, the noise could not have been more astounding. One couldn't hear the thunder for the roaring of the fall of water and hailstones, though the deep and awful note of the electric storm was in it to add to its tremendous sound. The darkness was now so heavy in the cuddy, that in the intervals of the lightning the faces of the people were scarce distinguishable. Amid the distacting noises of the thunder, of the breathless storm of hail and rain, of the water cascading off the decks overboard in a furious gushing and seething, arose the chorus of a number of seamen on the quarter-deck hauling upon the main-topsail halliards there, with the piercing chirruping of the boatswain's pipe and hoarse orders delivered overhead from the poop.

'Where's the steward?' bawled the colonel in his loudest tones. 'Confound it,

are we to be left in total blackness here? Why don't some one light the lamps?'

'Are you coming on deck, Mr. Emmett?' I cried; but he had sunk back on his seat with his arms folded and his head bowed; and obtaining no reply, I walked to the companion steps, receiving, as I passed Miss Temple, a half interrogative glance from her, which made me look again in readiness to answer the question that seemed to hover on her lips. But her eyes instantly dropped, and the next instant she had turned to say something to her aunt, who was on a sofa behind her; so, rounding on my heel, up I went into the smoking wet.

There was nothing to be seen but rain—such a sheet of it as one must explore the latitudes we were in to parallel. The lightning flashed amidst it incessantly, and every line of the falling water sparkled like glowing wire in dazzling hues of crimson and of violet alternating. I waited under the shelter of the companion cover till the first weight of all this rain and hail should have passed. Through the haze of moisture that rose like steam off the decks to the cataractal swamping, I could discern the figure of old Keeling

looking like a soaked scarecrow, the fine-weather hat upon his head reduced to pulp and hanging about his ears like a rotten fig. The fellow at the wheel stood like a statue amid the drenching downpour; but the men who had been stationed at the guns were gone.

I had not been a minute in the hatchway when the heavens seemed to be split open to the very heart of their depths by a flash of lightning, followed in the space of the beat of a heart by a shock of thunder that seemed to happen immediately over our mastheads—a most soul-subduing crash, if ever there was one! and as if by magic, the rain ceased, and the atmosphere sensibly brightened. There was a great noise of shrieking in the cuddy, and half blinded, and pretty handsomely dazed by that terrible blast of lightning and the thunder-clap which had followed, I crept down the steps with my pulse beating hard in my ears to see what had happened, scarce knowing but that some one had been struck and perhaps killed.

'What is it?' I shouted to the colonel, who stood at the foot of the ladder.

'Only Mrs. Hudson in hysterics,' he

roared; on hearing which I went up again, being in no temper to make one of the nervous company below.

The swell had flattened; all to starboard there was an oozing as of daylight into the breathless thickness, with ugly hump-shaped masses of black vapour defining themselves up in the ugly sallow smother in a sort of writhing way, as though they were coming together in a jumble; but to port it was as black as thunder, an inky slope hoary with rain, with lightning spitting and zigzagging all over it. I went to the rail, where stood Mr. Cocker with his clothes full of water.

'A pretty little shower!' said I.

'Very,' he answered, with his face showing of a bleached look like the flesh of a washerwoman's hand. 'A plague on this sort of work, say I! This serge shrinks consumedly when drenched, and my trousers will be up to my knees to-morrow morning—three pounds ten as good as washed out of a man's pocket.'

'Where's your glass, Mr. Cocker?'

'In that hencoop there,' said he.

I pulled out and directed it at the dim blotch of brig that had caught my eye steal-

ing out of the wet dusk like the phantom of a ship.

'By my great-grandfather's wig!' cried I with a start. 'So! no fear *now* of being boarded. Our windpipes are safe for the present. Look for yourself, Mr. Cocker.'

He ogled her an instant, then bawled to the skipper, who was speaking to Mr. Prance.

'The brig's been struck, sir! Her mainmast is over the side.'

In very truth it was as he declared. I whipped the glass out of his hand for another look, and, sure enough, could clearly distinguish a whole lumber of wreckage lifting to the roll of the subdued swell alongside the swaying hull of the brig. Her foremast and topmast stood intact to the cross-trees, but abaft she was as completely denuded as if a chopper had been laid to the foot of the mast. The mess is not to be described. I could make out that a length of her bulwark was crushed flat, and the black lines of shrouds and gear went snaking overboard like so many serpents wriggling out of the hatches into the water. But the gloom was too deep to suffer me to see what her people were doing.

I went to the companion way and called down to Colonel Bannister.

'Halloa? What now? Who wants *me*?' he shouted.

'Tell the ladies, colonel,' I sung down, 'that the brig has been struck by lightning, and that our safety, so far as *she* is concerned, is assured.'

I heard him roar out the news as I went to the side again, and a moment after up rushed the whole body of passengers to see for themselves. The decks were full of water, but nobody seemed to mind that. The ladies came splashing through it to the rail, some of them taking terrified peeps at the mass of winking blackness settling away down in the east, and dodging the play of lightning, as it were, with a sort of involuntary ducking of their heads and lifting of their fingers to their eyes.

Old Keeling cried out: 'Ladies, be good enough to take my advice and return to the cabin. We shall be having a strong blow of wind coming along in a few minutes.'

'Gott, she iss on fire!' here shouted Hemskirk, pointing directly at the brig with

a fat forefinger, whilst with the other hand he kept a binocular glass glued to his eyes.

'Is it so then, sir!' cried Mr. Prance to the skipper; 'there is smoke rising from her fore-hatch.'

Mr. Cocker had replaced his telescope in the hencoop; I jumped for it, and in a trice had the lenses bearing upon the brig. There was an appearance of smoke, a thin bluish haze of it, as though mounting from a newly kindled bonfire, slowly going spirally into the motionless air; but almost at the instant of my first looking I thought I could witness something of a ruddy tinge flashing for a breath into this smoke, as if to a sudden leap of flame. Though the brig lay at the same distance that had separated her from us throughout the afternoon, the shrouded and heaped-up vaporous wall of firmament beyond her seemed to heave her as close again to us as she really was; and now quite easily by the aid of the glass I could see her decks as she rolled them our way dark with her people, many of them hacking and hewing at her rigging, as though to clear away the wreckage; others seemingly passing buckets along; others, again, running wildly and as it might

seem aimlessly about, whilst with the regularity of a swing in action the beautifully moulded hull rolled quietly from side to side with a rhythmic oscillation of her one mast upon which the fragment of white trysail filled and hollowed as it beat the air, starting out upon the eye with a very ghastliness of pallor as it swelled to its cotton-like hue out of the shadow of its incurving, and hovered like some butterfly over the hideous dusky green of the swell.

I replaced the telescope.

'Here comes the wind!' I heard Mr. Cocker sing out.

'Ladies,' cried old Keeling, 'let me beg of you to step below.'

Most of them complied, but a few lingered, staring with curiosity at the coming weather. I watched it with amazement, for never before had I seen a storm of wind coming down upon a ship in a sort of wall. One saw the line of it in a ridge of foam whose extremities were lost in the gloom on either hand. It was of a glass-like smoothness all in front of it, and not a breath of air was to be felt when the stormy hissing of it was loud in our ears as it came sweeping up, the clouds on high

darting to right and left, and a paler faintness, as of increasing daylight, coming into the air along with it. The bull-like notes of Mr. Prance rang from the poop through the ship.

'Stand by main-topsail halliards—foretopsail sheets—foretopmast staysail downhaul.'

The wind struck the brig. My eye was upon her, and she disappeared in the shrieking whirl of flying spume as you extinguish a reflection in a mirror by breathing upon the glass. A minute later it was upon us. It smote the Indiaman right abeam, and down she lay in a seething and hissing flatness of boiling waters, stooping yet and yet, till the line of the topgallant bulwark rail looked to be flush with the furious yeasty smother. There were two men at the helm holding the wheel jammed hard over. I swung to a belaying pin on the weather rail, and the poop deck went down from me to leeward at an angle that made one's eyes reel in the head to look along it. There was a true hurricane note in the bellowing of the wind on high under the rush and disparting of the maddened clouds, and the first flash of it between our masts was as the passage of a score of

locomotives racing by at express speed and shrieking as they went.

I was waiting to see what the ship meant to do, when the weather main-topsail sheet parted, though a treble-reefed sail, with a sound like another clap of thunder, and in a moment the canvas was flogging away from the yard in ribands, with Mr. Cocker shouting at the top of his voice, and a crowd of seamen tumbling and capsizing about the main deck to the officer's orders to haul upon the clewlines. It was at that instant, amidst all this prodigious hallabaloo, that I caught sight of Miss Temple to leeward of the mizzen mast holding on to some gear that was belayed at the foot of the mast. As my gaze rested on her, the rope she grasped either overhauled itself or was detached from the pin, and she swung out to leeward. There were hencoops and rails and the mizzen shrouds to save her from going overboard; but there was nothing to prevent her from breaking a limb, or even her neck, if she let go. Though my legs yet preserved something of their old seafaring nimbleness, the slope of the deck made desperate work for them. Yet the girl must be reached, and at once. She did not appear to

have sense enough to lower herself down the rope till her feet touched, in which posture she might have hung with safety. She maintained her first clutch of the gear, and swung above the deck to the height of some two, perhaps three feet. Keeling, who was clinging to the weather vang, did not seem to see her. The helmsmen grinding at the wheel heeded nothing but their business. Mr. Prance and the second officer clawing at the brass rail at the break of the poop, leaned to windward, with their eyes on the streaming rags of the maintopsail shouting commands.

There was only one means of arriving at the girl with any approach to swiftness. I dropped on to the deck, and went down upon my knees with my head to windward, and worked my way stern first in that attitude to the line of lee hencoops, along which I made shift to travel half jammed by my own weight against the bars of the coops, until, coming abreast of the girl, I got upon my legs, and firmly planting my left foot against the bottom of the row of boxes in which the fowls were immured, and leaning on my right leg in a fencing posture, I put my arms round her waist and told her to let go. She did so at

once, as likely as not because she could hold on no longer. The weight of her noble figure was rather more than I had bargained for. I had thought to hold her fairly off the deck and ease her away, whilst in my arms, down to the hencoop behind, on which she could sit; but she was too much for me. I was forced to let her feet touch the planks, where, losing her balance, she threw her arm round my neck to save herself from falling. The next moment I was lodged upon the hencoop, she on my knee, and her arms still enclosing my head; but this was only for a breath or two. It was easy to lift her to my side, and there she sat, her fine face dark with blushes, and her eyes sparkling with alarm and confusion and twenty other passions and emotions, whilst the curve of her bosom rose and fell with hysteric swiftness.

'What a very ridiculous position! It serves me right. I should have taken the captain's advice. I should have gone below.'

This was all my haughty companion condescended to say. Not a syllable of thanks—not a glance of softness to reward me! However, to be reasonable, she could have scarcely been audible had she attempted more

words. Even to catch the few sentences she uttered I had to strain my ear to the movement of her lips, off which the wind clipped her speech with a silencing yell.

There had been but little in the thunder of the storm, which still showed livid over the eastern horizon, that surpassed the wild and prodigious roaring of this first outfly of the hurricane. The ship continued to lie down to the fierce sweep of the wind at the angle she had reached to—it was as good or bad, indeed, as being on her beam ends—and Miss Temple and I were forced to keep our seats upon the hencoop, no more able to crawl up the deck to where the companion hatch was than had it been a slope of polished ice. This maybe was what she meant by 'the ridiculousness of her position.' The captain, standing to windward, was sending ominous looks at the band of the foretopsail and at the foretopmaststaysail, the cloths of which continued miraculously to hold. There was too much wind for the sea to rise suddenly; indeed, the weight of the blast had smoothed down what remains of swell the rain and hail had left; the ocean was a level surface of foam, out of which the tempest of wind was tearing up whole snow-

storms of flakes of spume, which flew over the ship in clouds that whitened out into a sort of dazzle, as though sun touched, as they flew in their throbbing masses athwart the leaden sky which poured across the sea over the ship's bows in rags and trailing lengths and gyrating coils of sooty vapour.

'Look!' I shouted to Miss Temple, and pointed over our stern, where, out of the flying faintness and thickness of spray, the figure of the brig was at that instant forming itself.

I sprang upon the hencoop, the better to see, grasping the mizzen shrouds for support.

'Shall I give you a hoist?' I cried to the girl.

Her curiosity was too strong; the flying brig—a fleeting vision of the object which had filled us with alarm and suspense throughout the day, was a wonder to be witnessed at such a time as that at any cost. Her lips parted in the word yes to the howl of the gale, and in a moment I had her up alongside of me, my arm through hers, securely gripping and supporting her, and the pair of us gazing breathlessly at the sight astern.

With her single mast rising to the topmast

cross-trees, the yards square, the remains of the trysail streaming like white hair from gaff and boltrope, the brig swept under our stern, shooting sheer athwart, seething smoothly as a sleigh over a level plain of snow, and rushing before the wind straight as the flight of an arrow. A coil of thick black smoke, whose base was reddened by sudden tongues of fire, blew over her bow, and coloured the atmosphere into which she rushed with a complexion of thunder. It seemed to rise from the fore-hatch, and it fled straight off the deck. I caught a sight of crowds of men forward and aft, with a couple of fellows leaping into the fore-rigging as the brig rushed by, to gesticulate to us. But the vision came and went in a few breaths like an object seen by lightning. So dense was the gale with spray, that there was scarcely a cable's length of opening round about us. The brig showed and was gone! a phantasm, with the white waters pouring over her sprit-sail yard as she rushed through it, and no more of her was to be noted by the eye during the headlong swiftness of her plunge from one wall of spindrift into another, than the delicate lines of her rigging supporting the foremast, the bowsprit vanishing in a cloud of smoke,

blowing ahead of her, a length of white deck, a flash of skylight glass, the glimmer, so to speak, of some score of faces turned our way.

'She is on fire,' I cried in Miss Temple's ear: 'she carries a doomed crew into that thickness!'

She moved, as if to resume her seat, and very carefully I got her on to the hencoop again.

But the first terrific spite of the gale was now gone, and the squab form of the Indiaman lifting a little out of the seething cauldron in which she lay with her main-deck rail flush with the yeasty surface, was beginning slowly to pay off. Her decks gradually grew level, and presently she was right before the wind, with the howl of it at her taffrail, and her huge bows heaping up the white sea till the leaps of the summits were at either cathead.

Mr. Colledge's face showed in the companion-way.

'Oh, there you are, Miss Temple!' he roared. 'Mrs. Radcliffe is firmly persuaded you have been blown overboard.'

She rose, but sat again, for the wind was too strong for her. Friend Colledge himself

seemed pinned by the weight of it in the hatch.

'We may be able to manage it between us,' I shouted; and passing my arm through hers, I drove the pair of us to windward, and got her on to the companion ladder, down which she went.

CHAPTER XIII

FIRE!

It blew fiercely all that night. A mountainous sea was rolling two hours after the first of the gale, amid which the *Countess Ida* lay hove-to under a small storm trysail, making very heavy weather of it indeed. There was a deal to talk about, but no opportunity for conversing. Few were present at the dinner-table, though the sea then running was moderate in comparison with the sickening heights to which it swelled later on; and there was little more to be done throughout the meal than to hold on for dear life, to keep a keen weather-eye lifting upon one's food, and to gaze speechlessly across the table at one another amid an uproar of howling hurricane, of roaring waters, of straining bulkheads, of a ceaseless clattering of crockery and other noisy articles, that rendered conversation sheerly impossible.

And you may add to all this a good deal of consternation amongst us passengers. I had seen some weather in my time, but never the like of such a tossing and plunging bout as this. There were moments, indeed, when one felt it high time to go to prayers: I mean when the ship would lie down on the slant of some prodigious surge until she was hanging by her keel off the slope with her broadside upon the water, as though it were the bottom of her. There were many heave-overs of this sort, every one of which was accompanied by half-stifled shrieks from the cabins, by the sounds of the crash of boxes, unlashed articles, chairs, movable commodities of all kinds rushing with lightning-speed to leeward. Heavy contributions had been made upon our nervous systems by the incidents of the day: the vicinity of the brig—the prospect of having our windpipes slit—the furious thunder-storm—the spectacle of the lightning-struck craft: and the stock of fortitude left amongst us was but slender for a manly and courageous encounter of such an experience as this night was to prove.

I vividly recall the appearance of the cuddy at eleven o'clock when the hurricane

was nearing its height. The ship was hove-to on the starboard tack, and the lamps in the saloon would sometimes swing over to larboard till their globes appeared to rest against the upper deck. I had managed in some sort of parrot fashion to claw along the table to abreast of a swinging tray, where I mixed myself a glass of cold brandy grog, with which I slided down to a sofa on the lee-side; and there I sat looking up at the people to windward as at a row of figures in a gallery.

Heaven knows I was but little disposed to mirth; yet for the life of me I could not refrain from laughter at the miserable appearance presented by most of my fellow-passengers there assembled. Near to the cuddy front, on the windward seats, sat Mr Johnson, with terror very visibly working in his white countenance. His eyes rolled frightfully to every unusually heavy stoop of the ship, and his long lean frame writhed in a manner ludicrous to see, in his efforts to keep himself from darting forwards. Near him was Mr. Emmett, who strove to hold himself propped by thrusting at the cushions with his hands, and forking out his legs like a pair of open compasses with the toes stuck into the carpet

on the deck, as though he was a ballet dancer about to attempt a pirouette on those extremities. Little Mr. Saunders, who had thoughtlessly taken a seat on the weather side, sat with his short shanks swinging high off the deck in the last agonies, as one could see, of holding on. My eye was on him when he slided off the cushion to one of those dizzy heaves of the ship which might have made any man believe she was capsizing. He shot off the smooth leather like a bolt discharged from a cross-bow, and striking the deck, rolled over and over in the manner of a boy coming down a hill. There was nothing to arrest him; he passed under the table and arrived half-dead within a fathom of me; on which I edged along to his little figure and picked him up. He was not hurt, but was terribly frightened.

'What shocking weather, to be sure!' was all he said.

I put my glass of grog into the worthy little creature's hand, and he thanked me with one of his long-faced, wistful looks, then applied the tumbler to his mouth and emptied it.

But to end all this: at three o'clock in the

morning there was a sensible decrease in the gale. I had fallen asleep in the cuddy, and waking at that hour, and finding but one lamp dimly burning, and the interior deserted, I worked my way to the hatch, groped along to my cabin, and tumbled into my bunk, where I slept soundly till half-past eight. The sun was shining when I opened my eyes: the ship was plunging and rolling, but easily, and in a floating, launching manner, that proved her to be sailing along with the wind aft. Colledge was seated in his bunk with his legs over the edge, gazing at me meditatively.

'Awake?' he exclaimed.

'Yes,' said I.

'Fine weather this morning, Dugdale. But preserve us, what a night we've come through, hey? D'ye remember talking of the *fun* of a voyage? Yesterday was a humorous time certainly.'

I sprang out of bed. 'Patience, my friend, patience!' said I; 'this trip will end, like everything else in our world.'

'Ay, at the bottom of the sea, for all one is to know,' he grumbled. 'A rod of land before twenty thousand acres of shipboard,

say I. By the way, you and Miss Temple looked very happy in each other's company when I peeped out of the hatch yesterday to see what had become of her, at her aunt's request.'

'You should have risen through the deck a little earlier,' said I. 'You would have found her hanging.'

'Hanging!' he cried.

'Oh, not by the neck,' said I.

'What did you do?'

'I rescued her. I seized her by the waist and bore her gloriously to a hencoop.'

'Did you put your arms round her waist?' said he, staring at me.

'I did,' I exclaimed.

He looked a little gloomy. Then brightening in a fitful kind of way, he said: 'Well, I suppose you *had* to do it—a case of pure necessity, Dugdale?'

I closed one eye and smiled at him.

'She's a very fine woman,' said he, gazing at me gloomily again. 'I trust you have not been indiscreet enough to tell her that I am engaged to be married?'

'Oh now, my dear Colledge, *don't* let us trifle—*don't* let us trifle!' said I. 'Scarcely have you escaped the risk of being boarded

by pirates—the chance of being beheaded by some giant picaroon—of being struck dead by lightning—of foundering in this ship in the small-hours, when round with circus speed sweep your thoughts to the ladies again, and your mouth is filled with impassioned questions. Where's your gratitude for these hairbreadth escapes?' and being by this time in trim for my morning bath, I bolted out of the cabin, laughing loudly, and deaf to his shout of, 'I say, though, *did* you tell her that I was engaged?'

The ocean was a very grand sight. The wind still blew fresh, but as the ship was running with it, it seemed to come without much weight. The sea was flowing in long tall surges of an amazing richness and brilliance of blue, and far and near their foaming heads flashed out to the sunshine in a splendour of whiteness that contrasted most gloriously with the long dark slopes of unbroken water. From sea-line to sea-line the sky was overspread with clouds of majestic bulk and grandeur of swelling form, as white in parts as the foam which broke under them, and with many rainbows in their skirts, and a tender violet shading in the centre of them, that gave them as

they soared above the horizon the look of brushing the very heads of the coursing seas. The Indiaman was thundering through it under whole topsails and topgallant-sails, rolling with the stateliness of a line-of-battle ship as she went, with a rhythmically recurring stoop of her ponderous bows till the water boiled to the line of her forecastle rail, and her deck forward looked to lie as flat as a spoon in the dazzling smother.

I saw Mr. Prance on the poop, and having had my bath, stepped aft to exchange a greeting with him.

'The ship appears to have come safely out of last night's mess,' said I.

'It was a real breeze,' he answered; 'nothing suffered but the main-topsail. The *Countess Ida's* a proper ship, Mr. Dugdale. Those who put her together made all allowances, even for her rats. There's some craft I know would have strained themselves into mere baskets in last night's popple. But there was not an inch more of water this morning in the *Countess's* well than will drain into her in twenty-four hours in a river.'

'And the brig, Mr. Prance? I believe I

and Miss Temple were the two who saw the last of her.'

'No. Captain Keeling spied her as she swept under our stern,' said he. 'She was on fire; and by this time, I reckon her beautiful hull—and truly beautiful it was, Mr. Dugdale—will be represented somewhere around us here by a few charred fragments.'

'Or,' said I, 'even supposing they managed to extinguish the fire, Mr. Prance, her one mast with most of its heavy hamper aloft was not going to stand the hurricane very long. So she'll either be a few blackened staves, as you say, or a sheer hulk. And her people?'

'Ah,' exclaimed the chief mate, fetching a deep breath, 'from eighty to a hundred of them I allow. There's no boat put together by mortal hands could have lived last night. By heavens though, but it is enough to make a harlequin thoughtful to figure such a ship-load of souls as that brig carried hurried into mere carcases for the deep-sea dab to smell to and the wall-eyed cod of the Atlantic to nibble at.'

'Now, honestly, Mr. Prance—do you really believe there was anything of the pirate about that brig?'

'Honestly, Mr. Dugdale, I do, sir; and I haven't a shadow of a doubt that if the weather had taken any other turn, if a sailing breeze had sprung up, or the water had held smooth enough for a boating excursion, her people would have put us to our trumps with a good chance of their crippling us and plundering us, to say no more.'

Here the breakfast bell rang, and I rushed to the cabin to complete my toilet for the table.

There was no lack of talk this morning when the passengers had taken their places. The anxieties of the preceding day and night seemed only to have deepened the purple hue of old Keeling's countenance, and his face showed like the north-west moon in a mist betwixt the tall points of his shirt collars, as he turned his skewered form from side to side answering questions, smirking to congratulations, and bowing to the 'Good-morning, captain,' showered upon him by the ladies. Mr. Johnson came to the table with a black eye, and Dr. Hemmeridge's forehead was neatly inlaid with an immense strip of his own sticking-plaster, the effect in both cases of the gentlemen having fallen out of their bunks in the night.

Colonel Bannister had sprained a wrist, and the pain made him unusually vindictive and aggressive in his remarks. The weather had not apparently served the ladies very kindly. Mrs. Hudson presented herself with her wig slightly awry, and her daughter looked as if she had not been to bed for a week. It was hard to realise, in fact, that the pale spiritless young lady with heavy violet eyes looking languidly through their long lashes, which deepened yet the dark shadow in the hollows under them, was the golden, flashful, laughing, coquettish young creature of the preceding morning.

I had made sure of a bow at least from Miss Temple ; but I never once caught so much as a glance from her. Yet she was very easy and smiling in her occasional conversation with Colledge across the table. She alone of the women seemed to have suffered nothing from the violent usage of the night that was gone. In faultlessness of appearance, so far as her hair and attire and the like went, she might have stepped from her bedroom ashore after a couple of hours spent with her maid before a looking-glass. Not even a look for me, thought I! not even one of those cold

swiftly fading smiles with which she would receive the greeting of a neighbour or a sentence from the captain!

I was stupid enough to feel piqued—to suffer from a fit of bad temper, in short, which came very near to landing me in an ugly quarrel with Mr. Johnson.

'D'ye know, I rather wish *now*,' said this journalist, addressing us generally at one end of the table, but with an air of caution, as though he did not desire the colonel to hear him, 'that that brig yesterday *had* attacked us. It would have furnished me with an opportunity for a very remarkable sea-description.'

'Tut!' said I, with a sneer; 'before a man can describe he must see; and what would *you* have seen?'

'Seen, sir?' he cried; 'why, everything that might have happened, sir.'

'Amongst the rats perhaps down in the hold. Nothing more to be seen *there*, unless it's bilgewater.'

'Goot!' cried Mynheer Hemskirk. 'It vould hov been vonny to combare Meester Shonson's description mit der reeality.'

'I will ask you not to question my courage,'

said Mr. Johnson, looking at me with a face whose paleness was not a little accentuated by his black eye. 'I believe when it came to the scratch I should be found as good as another. *You* would have fought, of course,' he added, with a sarcastic sneer at me.

'Yes; I would have fought then, just as I am ready to fight now,' said I, looking at him.

'Gentlemen, gentlemen,' exclaimed Mr. Prance, in a subdued reprimanding voice, 'the ladies will be hearing you in a minute.'

'You have been a sailor, Dugdale, you know,' remarked Mr. Emmett in a satirical tone, 'and might, therefore, have guessed yesterday that either the brig was a harmless trader, or that, supposing her to have been of a piratical nature, she would not attack us.'

'And what then?' cried I, eyeing him hotly.

'Well,' said he, with a foolish grin, 'of course, under those circumstances, a large character for heroism might be earned very cheaply indeed.'

Johnson lay back in his chair to deliver himself of a noisy laugh. His seat was a fixed revolving contrivance, and its one socketed leg might have been injured during the night.

Be this as it may, on the journalist flinging himself back with a loud applauding 'Ha! ha!' of his friend Emmett's satiric hit at me, the chair broke, and backward he went with it with a knife in one hand and a fork in the other. Old Keeling started to his feet; the stewards came in a rush to the prostrate man. Those ladies who were near gathered their gowns about them as they watched him plunging in his efforts to extricate himself from the chair, in which his hips were in some manner jammed. For my part, having breakfasted, and being half suffocated with laughter, I was glad enough to run away out on deck. Indeed, the disaster had cooled my temper, and this occurrence was something to be thankful for, since one thing was leading to another, and, for all one could tell, the journalist and I might have come to blows as we sat side by side.

He and Emmett cut me for the rest of the day. My own temper was sulky for the most part. I spent the whole of the morning on the forecastle, smoking pipe after pipe in the 'eyes' of the ship, yarning in a fragmentary way with the boatswain, who invented excuses to come into the 'head' to indulge in a brief

chat with me, whilst by his postures and motions he contrived to wear an air of business to the gaze that might be watching from the poop.

I would not own to myself that the sullen cast of my temper that day was due to Miss Temple; but secretly I was quite conscious that my mood was owing to her, and the mere perception of this was a new vexation to me. For what was this young lady to me? What could signify her coolness, her insolence, her cold and cutting disregard of me? We had barely exchanged a dozen words since we left the Thames. Though my admiration of her fine figure, her haughty face, her dark, tragic, passionate eyes was extravagantly great, it was hidden; she had not divined it; and she was therefore without the influence over my moods and emotions which she might have possessed had I known that she was conscious how deeply she fascinated me. She would not even give me a chance to thoroughly dislike her. The heart cannot steer a middle course with such a woman as she. Had her behaviour enabled me to hate her, I should have felt easy; but her conduct was of the marble-like quality of her features, hard and

polished, and too slippery for the passions to set a footing upon. 'Pshaw!' thought I again and again, as I viciously hammered the ashes out of the bowl of my pipe on the forecastle rail, 'am not I an idiot to be thinking of yonder woman in this fashion, musing upon her, speculating about her—a person who is absolutely as much a stranger to me as any fine lady driving past me in a London Park!' Yet would I repeatedly catch myself stealing peeps at her from under the arch of the courses, hidden as I was right forward in the ship's bows, while she was pacing the length of the poop with Mr. Colledge, or standing awhile to hold a conversation with her aunt and Captain Keeling, the nobility of her figure and the chilling lofty dignity of her bearing distinctly visible to me all that way off, and strongly defining her amongst the rest of the people who wavered and straggled about the deck.

The wind lightened towards noon; the fine sailing breeze failed us, and sank into a small air off the larboard beam; the swell of the sea went down, but the colour of the brine was still the same rich sparkling blue of the early morning. I had never seen so deeply

pure and beautiful a tint in the ocean in these parallels. It made one think of the Cape Horn latitudes, with the white sun wheeling low, and a gleam of ice in the distant sapphire south. The great masses of cream-soft rainbow-tinctured cloud melted out, and at two o'clock in the afternoon it was a true equinoctial day, and the Indiaman a hot tropic picture, awnings spread, the pitch softening betwixt the seams, a sort of bluish steamy haze lazily floating off the line of her bulwark rail, through which the dim sea-limit showed in a sultry sinuous horizon. The ship rippled through it, clothed to her trucks with cloths that shone with the silver whiteness of stars to the hot noontide effulgence. The ayahs lolled about the quarter-deck, and John Chinaman sat upon a carronade fretting the baby he held into squeals of laughter and temper by tossing t The old sow grunted with a grave grubbing noise under the long-boat, and fore and aft every cock in the ship was swelling his throat with defiant fine-weather crowings.

It was somewhere about three bells that evening—half-past seven o'clock—that I was standing with Mr. Prance at the brass rail

that protected the break of the poop, the pair of us leaning upon it, watching a grinning hairy fellow capering in a hornpipe a little abaft the stowed anchor on the forecastle. The one-eyed ape which we had rescued, and which by this time was grown a favourite amongst the seamen, sat low in the foreshrouds, watching the dancing sailor—an odd bit of colour for the picture of the fore-part of the ship, clothed as he was in a red jacket and a cap like an inverted flower-pot, the tassel of it drooping to his empty socket. It was a most perfect ocean evening, the west glowing gloriously with a scarlet sunset, the sea tenderly heaving, a soft warm breathing of air holding the lighter sails aloft quiet. All the passengers were on deck saving Miss Temple, who was playing the piano to herself in the cuddy. In the recess just under me were three or four smokers; and the voice of Mr. Hodder waxing warm in some argument with Mynheer Peter Hemskirk, entered with unpleasant disturbing emphasis into the tender concert of sounds produced by the fiddlers forward, the occasional laughter of the seamen, the tinkling in the saloon, the voices of the ladies aft, the gentle rippling of water

alongside, combining, and softened by distance and the vastness amid which the ship floated, into a sort of music.

I was in the midst of a pleasant yarn with Mr. Prance, whilst we hung over the rail, half watching the jigging chap forward, and half listening to each other. He was recounting some of his early experiences at sea, with a hint in his manner of lapsing anon into a sentimental mood on his lighting upon the name of a girl whom he had been betrothed to.

All on a sudden the music forward ceased. The fiddler that was working away upon the booms jumped up and peered downwards in the posture of a man snuffling up some strange smell. The fellow who was dancing came to a halt and looked too, walking to the forecastle edge and inclining his ear towards the forehatch, as it seemed. He stared round to the crowd of his shipmates who had been watching him, and said something, and a body of them came to where he was and stood gazing. The weather clew of the mainsail being lifted, all that happened forward lay plain in sight to those who were aft.

'What is wrong there?' exclaimed Mr.

Prance abruptly, breaking off from what he was saying, and sending one of his falcon looks at the forecastle. 'The pose of that fiddling chap might make one believe he was tasting cholera somewhere about.'

A boatswain's mate came down the forecastle ladder and went to the forehatch, where he paused. Then, with a glance aft, he came right along to the quarter-deck with hurried steps, and mounted the poop ladder, coming to a stand when his head was on a level with the upper deck.

'What is it?' cried Mr. Prance.

The fellow answered in a low voice, audible only to the chief officer and myself: 'There's a smell of fire forwards, sir, and a sound as of some one knocking inside of the hatch.'

'A smell of fire!' ejaculated the mate; and swiftly, though preserving his quiet bearing, he descended to the quarter-deck and walked forward.

I had long ago made myself free of all parts of the ship, and guessed, therefore, that my following in the wake of the mate would attract no attention, nor give significance to a business which might prove a false alarm.

By the time he had reached the hatch, I was at his side. The boatswain and sailmaker came out of their cabins, a number of seamen quitted the forecastle to join us, and the rest gathered at the edge of the raised deck, looking down. The fore-hatch was a great square protected by a cover that was to be lifted in pieces. A tarpaulin was stretched over it with battening irons to keep it fixed, for this was a hatch there was seldom or never any occasion to enter at sea, the cargo in all probability coming flush to it.

I had scarcely stood a moment in the atmosphere of this hatch, when I became sensible of a faint smell as of burning, yet too subtle to be detected by a nostril that was not particularly keen. As I was sniffing to make sure, there came a hollow, dull noise of knocking, distinct, and unmistakably produced by some one immediately under the hatch striking at it with a heavy instrument. Mr. Prance hung in the wind for a second or two snuffling and hearkening with the countenance of one who discredits his senses.

'Why' he exclaimed, 'there *is* somebody below, and—and'—— Here he sniffed up hard with much too much energy, methought,

to enable him to taste the faint fumes. 'Carpenter,' he exclaimed to the withered old Scotchman who made one of the crowd of onlookers, 'get this hatch stripped and the cover lifted—quickly, but *quietly*, if you please.'

He looked sternly round upon the men; and then sent a hurried glance aft, where stood Captain Keeling in the spot we had just vacated, with Mrs. Radcliffe on his arm.

The battens were nimbly drawn, the tarpaulin thrown aside, and some seamen stooped to raise the hatch cover. A few seconds were expended in prising and manœuvring, in the midst of which the knocking was repeated with a note of violence in it, accompanied by a general start and a growl of wonder from all hands.

'Heave!' cried the carpenter, and up came the cover, followed by a small cloud of blue smoke, and immediately after by the figure of the hideous sailor Crabb, who sprang from off the top of a layer of white-wood cases with a loud curse and a horrible fit of coughing.

CHAPTER XIV

CRABB

THE atmosphere was still red with the sunset, though the luminary was below the horizon, and there was plenty of light to see by. An extraordinary shout went up from amongst the men at the sight of Crabb, as he leapt out of the hatch in the heart of the little cloud of smoke. Those who were on the side of the deck on to which he jumped recoiled with a positive roar of horror and fright, one or two of them capsizing and rolling over and over away from the hatch, as though they were in too great a hurry to escape to find time to get upon their legs.

I very well remember feeling the blood desert my cheek, whilst my heart seemed to come to a stand, and my breathing grow difficult at the apparition of the fellow. *Crabb*! Why, I had *seen* him lying dead in his bunk! I had heard of him as lying stitched up in a

hammock on this very fore-hatch! I had beheld that same hammock flash overboard, and I had watched it lifting and frisking away astern! Who, then, was yonder hideous creature that had jumped in hobgoblin fashion out of the hold? Could he be the buried Crabb himself?

There is no lack of things to frighten people withal in this world; but I cannot conceive of any shock comparable to the instant consternation felt by a man who meets another of whose death he is profoundly assured, and whom he has been thinking of as a corpse, dead and buried, for any number of days gone by. The general horror, the prodigious universal amazement which held the mate and me and others amongst us speechless and motionless, as though we had been blasted and withered up by some electric bolt from heaven, scarcely endured a minute; yet by that handful of seconds was the picture of this amazing incident framed. I see Crabb now as he let fall his arm from his face when his fit of choking coughing ceased; and I recall the blind wild look of his distorted eyes, as he slowly turned his countenance round, as though the mild evening light was

violently oppressive to his vision after the days of blackness passed in the hold. His repulsive countenance was dark with dirt and grime. I observed many scratches upon his arms, which were naked to the elbows, as though he were fresh from squeezing and boring through some ugly jagged intricacies of stowed commodities. His shirt hung in rags upon him; there were many rents in his loose trousers; and there was blood upon his exposed chest, from a wound seemingly made by the sharp head of a nail or some edge of iron-sheathed case.

'Seize that man, bo'sun,' suddenly roared Mr. Prance, leaping out of his benumbed condition of astonishment in a way to make one think of a bull sweeping out through a hedge: 'handcuff him, and shut him up in your berth for the present. Get the head-pump rigged—the hose passed along. Jump for buckets, and stand by to pass them down.'

The powerful hand of the boatswain closed like a vice upon Crabb's neck. I thought to see a struggle, but the ugly sailor seemed weak and dazed, and stepped passively to the boatswain's berth into which my friend shot him, following and closing the door, to conceal, I

suppose, the operation of manacling the man from the eyes of the half-stupefied Jacks.

Half-stupefied, I say: but the orders of the mate were like the flourish of some magic wand over each man. There was a headlong rush, though with something of discipline in the hurry of it too, at the chief officer's command. Smoke was draining through the open hatch, floating up thinly and lazily, though it was a thing to make one hold one's breath, not knowing but that the next vomit might prove a thicker, darker coil, with a lightning-like reddening of the base of it to the flicker of some deep down tongue of flame. Fire at sea! Ah, great God! Out of the mere thought of it will come the spirit of the fleetest runner into the laziest and most lifeless shanks.

The mate sprang on top of the cases stowed level with the lower edges of the hold with a cry for men to follow him. The interior was the fore-part of the 'tween decks, bulkheaded off some little distance before the mainmast, and filled with light, easily handled goods. The hatch conducting to the ship's hold lay closed immediately under these few tons of

freight in a line with the yawning square into which Mr. Prance had sprung. Where was the fire? If in the lower hold, then heaven help us! I glanced aft, and saw the captain hastily walking forward. The passengers had come together in a crowd, and were staring with pale faces from the head of the poop ladder. Old Keeling was perfectly cool. He asked no questions, made no fuss, simply came to the side of the hatch, saw Mr. Prance and a gang of men at work breaking out the cargo, and stood watching, never hindering the people's labour by a question. His keen seawardly eye took in everything in a breath. One needed but to watch his face to see *that*. The placidity of the fine old fellow was a magnificent influence. In an incredibly short space of time, the captain meanwhile never once opening his lips, the head-pump was rigged, the hose trailed along and pointed ready, a number of seamen were standing in files with buckets ranged along all prepared for drawing water, and passing it to the hatchway with the swiftest expedition. I cannot express the wonderful encouragement the heart found in this silence alone. The captain trusted his chief mate, saw that he exactly knew what to

do, and stood by as a spectator, with just one look of approval at his quiet, resolute, deep-breathing ranks of seamen awaiting orders.

Once he turned his purple face, and observing Mr. Johnson and Mr. Emmett and one or two others nervously edging their way forwards, he beckoned with a long forefinger to a boatswain's mate and said in a low voice: 'Drive those gentlemen aft on to the poop, and see that none of the passengers leaves it.' He glanced at me once, but said nothing, possibly because he had found me looking on when he arrived.

All as tranquilly as though the job was no more than the mere breaking.out of a few boxes of passengers' luggage, the work of removing the cargo so as to get at the fire proceeded. The smoke continued to steal stealthily up. The contents of the cases I do not know, but they were light enough to be lifted easily. A number of them were got on deck. The mate and Mr. Cocker—who had arrived from his cabin shortly after the captain had come—headed the gang of workers, and rapidly disappeared in the lanes they opened.

'Here it is!' at last came a muffled shout. Mr. Cocker coming out of a dark hole like

a rat, with the perspiration streaming from him as though a bucket of oil had been capsized over his head, sang out for the hose to be overhauled and the pump to be worked.

'Have you discovered the fire, sir?' said the captain, calling down to him in such a collected voice as he would have used in requesting a passenger to take wine with him.

'Yes, sir. It is a small affair. The hose will suffice, I think, sir.'

An instant after, the clanking of the plied pump was to be heard along with the sound of water steadily gushing, followed by a cloud of steam, which quickly vanished. A quarter of an hour later the mate came up black as a chimney-sweep. He touched his cap to the captain, and simply said: 'the fire's out, sir.'

'What was it, Mr. Prance?'

'A bale of blankets, sir.'

'Can you guess how it originated?'

'I expect that the man Crabb——' began the mate.

The captain started and stared.

'The man Crabb,' continued Mr. Prance, 'whom we imagined dead and buried, sir, has

been skulking in the hold'—old Keeling frowned with amazement—'and I have no doubt he fired the bale whilst lighting his pipe.'

'Crabb in the hold!' cried the skipper; 'do you speak of the man whom we buried, sir?'

'The same, sir,' answered Mr. Prance.

Old Keeling gazed about him with a gaping face. 'But he died, sir, and was buried,' he exclaimed. 'I read the funeral service over him, and saw, sir—Mr. Prance, I *saw* with my own eyes the hammock fall from the grating after it had been tilted'

The chief officer said something in reply which I did not catch, owing to the noise amongst the men who were yet in the hold and the talk of the sailors round about. He then walked to the boatswain's berth followed by the captain, that old marline-spike's eyes might bear witness to the assurance that the Crabb who had leapt up out of the fore-hatch in a smother of smoke was the same Crabb who had been solemnly interred over the ship's side some weeks before.

Mr. Cocker came wriggling out of the hold and got on to the deck alongside of me to

superintend the restowal of the broken-out goods.

'Is the fire out?' I asked.

'Black out,' he answered. 'It was no fire, to speak truly of it, Mr. Dugdale. A top bale of blankets or some such stuff was smouldering in about the circle of a five-shilling piece—a little ring eating slowly inwards, but throwing out smoke enough to furnish forth a volcano for a stage-scene. A beastly smell! not to speak of some of the stuff down there being as blackening as a shoe-polisher's brushes.' Here he looked at the palms of his hands, which were only a little more grimy than his face.—'But what's this I hear about Crabb? Has the dead sailor come to life again?'

'He's yonder,' said I, nodding towards the boatswain's berth, which the captain and mate had entered, closing the door after them: 'you'll need to see to believe. Time was that when a man was dropped over a ship's side with a cannon-ball at his feet he was as dead as if his brains were out. D'ye remember, Mr. Cocker, how that hammock went floating astern, as if there were less than a dead sailor in it, though something

more than nothing? There's been some devilish stealthy scheme here depend upon it. We may yet find out that the ship wasn't scuttled because the ugly rogue hadn't time to pierce through the lower hatch before he set the vessel on fire.'

'But he was a dead man, sir; Hemmeridge saw him dead,' cried Cocker, eyeing me with an inimitable air of astonishment.

'Ay,' said I, 'dead as the bones of a mummy. But he's *there* all the same,' I added pointing to the forecastle cabin, 'as alive as you or I, and capable, I daresay, of kicking after a little.'

At this moment the mate put his head out of the boatswain's berth and called to Mr. Cocker, on which I walked leisurely aft, with amazement in me growing, and scarcely capable of realising the truth of what I had seen.

The passengers were still crowding the fore-part of the poop, peering and eagerly talking, but in subdued voices, with Colonel Bannister moving angrily amongst them, and the boatswain's mate sentinelling the foot of the ladder.

'Oh, Mr. Dugdale,' cried Mrs. Radcliffe,

leaning over the rail and crying down her question with a pecking motion of her head; 'is the fire out, do you know? Are we safe?'

'The fire *is* out, madam,' I replied, lifting my hat; 'and the ship is as safe this minute as ever she was in the Thames. Captain Keeling will, I have no doubt, be here very shortly to reassure you.'

Miss Temple, towering half a head above her aunt, looked down at me with an air of imperious questioning in her face. There was a hot scarlet blush all along the west, yet with power enough in its illumination to render each face of the crowd above quite distinguishable against the tender shadow stealing from the east into the air, and I could see an eagerness in the girl's full, dark, glowing, and steadfast gaze to warrant me the honour of a conversation with her if I chose to ascend the ladder. But just then Hemmeridge came out of the cuddy on to the quarter-deck with the hint of a stagger in his walk. His eyes showed that he was only just awake, and his hair that he had run out of his cabin in a hurry.

'I say, Dugdale,' he exclaimed, 'what's

been the matter, hey? Fire, is it? And the steward tells me that Crabb has come back. Has the man gone mad?'

'There's been a fire,' said I, 'and Crabb has come back.'

Here Cocker came along the deck.

'Doctor, the captain wants you.'

'Where is he?'

'Come along; I'll take you to him,' said the second-mate, running his eye over Hemmeridge's figure with a half-look on at me full of meaning in it.

They walked forward, the doctor a trifle unsteady in his gait, I thought.

I went to my berth for some tobacco; I stayed a short time below, and when I returned, the last scar of sunset was gone. The west was a liquid violet darkness trembling with stars, and the ship was floating through the darkness of the night, which in these latitudes follows swiftly upon the heels of the departing day. Captain Keeling had come aft, and was standing in the midst of a crowd of passengers answering questions, and soothing the women, who were snapping inquiries in whole volleys, their voices threaded by tremors and shrill with nerves. Mr. Prance,

who had found time to cleanse himself, was on deck in charge of the ship. All was hushed forwards. Against the stars twinkling over the line of the forecastle rail under the foot of the foresail, that slowly lifted and fell to the heave of the ship, I could distinguish the outlines of sailors moving here and there in twos and threes. A subdued hoarse growling of voices came out of the block of darkness round about the galley and the longboat, where were gathered a number of men, doubtlessly discoursing on the marvellous incident of the evening. The glittering brilliants in the sky winked like dewdrops along the black edge of the spars and at the extremity of the yard-arms; and spite of the voices of the people aft and of the mutterings forward, so deep was the ocean hush up aloft that again and again the sound of the delicate night-breeze, breathing lightly into the visionary spaces of the sails, would fall like a sigh upon the ear.

'An exciting piece of work, Mr Prance, said I, stepping to his side, 'taking it from the start to the close.'

'Why, yes,' he answered. 'The passengers will not be wanting in experiences to relate when they get ashore. Enough has happened

yesterday and to-day, in the way of excitement, I mean, to last out an ordinary voyage, though it were as long as one of Captain Cook's.'

'What has Hemmeridge to say about this business of Crabb, do you know?' I asked.

'You will keep the news to yourself, if you please,' he answered; 'but I don't mind telling *you* that he's under arrest—that is to say, he has to consider himself so.'

'What for?' I asked, greatly astonished.

'Why, Mr Dugdale,' said he, slowly looking round, to make sure that the coast was clear, 'you may easily guess that this business of the scoundrel Crabb—an old pirate, as I remember telling you, signifies a very deep-laid plot, an atrociously ingenious conspiracy.'

'I supposed that at once,' said I.

'The fellow Crabb feigned to be dead,' he continued. 'A sham it must have been, otherwise he wouldn't be in irons yonder. Now, are we to believe that Hemmeridge can't distinguish between death and life? He reports the man dead to the captain. The fellow is stitched up; but, as we have since ascertained, a prepared hammock is substituted for the one that conceals his remains, and we

bury maybe some clump of wood. This is the part Captain Keeling least likes, I think. He is a pious old gentleman, and his horror when'—— He checked himself with a cough, and a sound on top of it like a smothered laugh, as though he enjoyed some fancy in his mind, but durst not be too candid, since it was the captain he talked about.

'It is assumed,' said I, 'that Hemmeridge represented Crabb as dead knowing him to be alive?' He nodded. 'What will have been the project?' I continued, shaping out the truth as, bit by bit, it formed itself in my head. 'Robbery, of course. Ay, Mr. Prance, that will have been it. Crabb is to be smuggled into the hold, the notion throughout the ship being that he is dead and overboard; and when in the hold'—— I stopped.

'Well,' said he with a shrug of his shoulders, 'there's the mail-room. What else? With a parcel of diamonds in it worth seventy thousand pounds, not to speak of money, jewelry, and other precious matters.'

'By heavens! did any man ever hear the like of such a plot?' cried I; 'and Hemmeridge is suspected as a confederate?'

'We shall see, we shall see,' he answered.

'Just tell me this, Mr. Prance,' I exclaimed, thirsty with curiosity, 'who are the others involved? Somebody must have shifted Crabb's remains.'

'The sailmaker is in irons,' said he.

'Yes! I might have sworn it! Why is it that the high Roman nose of that chap has haunted my recollection of the ghastly appearance Mr. Crabb presented at every recurrence of my mind to the loathsome picture?'

He slightly started, and I could see him eyeing me earnestly.

'By the way,' he exclaimed, 'now that I think of it, Hemmeridge showed Crabb's body to *you*, didn't he?'

'Certainly he did,' I responded.

'Well, it will give the doctor a chance,' said he, as though thinking aloud; and so saying he made some steps in the direction of the captain, and I went down on the quarter-deck to blow a cloud and muse upon the matters he had filled my mind with.

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